

THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER

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Yours very sincerely
John Macbride

THE
PRODIGAL'S BROTHER

A STORY OF WESTERN LIFE

BY

JOHN MACKIE

*Author of "The Devil's Playground," "Sinners Twain,"
"They that Sit in Darkness," etc.*

SANS PEUR ET
SANS REPROCHE



LONDON

JARROLD & SONS, 10 & 11, WARWICK LANE, E.C.

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1899

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TO
MY OLD COMRADES
BY THE CAMP - FIRES
IN THE LAND OF
THE BLOOD-RED SUNSETS.

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THE PRODIGAL'S BROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRODIGAL.

THAT the prodigal son has always been a much more interesting man than his brother is not only conceded by Holy Writ, but tradition, not to speak of public opinion generally, has even gone so far as to assert that the "wretched" prodigal is upon the whole a rather attractive and lovable individual, while his brother is, as often as not, a nonentity and a muff to boot.

Had Stephen Ironside listened to any such comforting opinions they would hardly have sufficed to put him on good terms with himself. But then "Steve," as he was usually called, was the prodigal—the prodigal for whom there was no killing of kids, far less fatted calves—who had made the

inevitable mess of his life—who served as a splendid object lesson to those who looked after the morals of the young, and who, in accordance with the eternal contrariness of things, was secretly admired by the latter because there was a strong suggestion about him of the old original Adam.

Steve was in that most unenviable physical condition known to the initiated as “suffering recovery.” For the enlightenment of those readers whose experiences have not been called upon to wrestle with such mysterious and vulgar terms, it may be explained that on the previous night he had been looking on the wine when it was red, and now was paying the penalty of his libations by feeling remarkably seedy. This is the worst of drinking—the to-morrow; though, strangely enough, while freely indulging no one will ever give that morrow a second thought.

Steve lay on the high bank of the broad Saskatchewan river, some little distance above the township of Calumet, and cursed himself as only a prodigal can. He did not keep repeating to himself that “he would never do it again,” for he had passed that stage, and knew very well that he would—the very first chance he got. This correct diagnosis of

his own case had not been arrived at without scores and scores of futile and erroneous forecasts,—after all, there is no teacher like experience. The day was hot and sultry, aggravating his sickly, querulous, headachy condition ; for there is no use disguising the fact that when he had done calling himself a blanked fool for the hundredth time, he anathematized the sun in a most absurd and reprehensible manner, because it proved too much for the one scraggy bastard-maple that he had crawled under for shade. But then, when a man suffers as Steve did, he is either a lion or a lamb—more often a lamb than a lion. As for Steve, he gravitated between these two states according to his mercurial physical condition. At the same time had anyone called him either a lion or a lamb, they would have found there was an unpleasant preponderance of the first-named animal in his nature. At thirty-two one ought to be learning sense ; but at this age Steve was as far from following in the footsteps of the blue-eyed goddess as he had ever been. True, he had eaten many a time of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, finding it sweet and bitter by turns,—it had not helped him. Some years before, when his conscience was more tender,

disgusted with himself, and, doubtless, with a vague idea that it would be a relief to his relatives to be well rid of him, he had joined a wild, reckless band of adventurers, and gone westward into the then great unknown—that mysterious region from which the Mississippi springs: the land of blood-red sunsets beyond which lie the happy hunting-grounds of the red man.

Five years elapsed, and then at the close of one chill, blear-eyed day, late in the fall of the year, he had crept back to his native village, a spare, travel-stained and subdued-looking man, literally in rags, and with the history of a stirring, reckless career written on his rather handsome sun-browned face. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was bitter in his mouth just then. But there was no fatted calf for him; his father, a kindly and somewhat austere man, had died only three weeks before he had come back, and the withering prairie flowers had been disturbed on his mother's grave. Who is it says there is no hell? Whoever does has yet to taste the fruit of that forbidden tree. For weeks and months Steve lived and suffered in the hell of remorse. When his brother was barely civil to him, and flung him some clothes to cover his nakedness,

much after the manner of one who flings a bone to an importunate dog to get rid of it, he bit his lip and kept a guard upon that keen fiery tongue of his, because he knew he more than deserved the slights that were heaped upon him. But he stifled in their birth the genuine words of contrition that would fain have expressed themselves. A few kindly sympathetic words just then, words free from all worldly considerations, and Steve might have become a different man; the chances are that his head would not have been sore on this particular day, and instead of the bitterness in his heart there might have been something that suited the man better.

And now as Steve lay with his throbbing temples buried in his hands, his body sick and sore—a body of jangling agonised nerves, and the spirit of Ishmael in his heart, there came the sound of buggy wheels along the trail. The buggy stopped and someone cried, “Hilloa, there!” but Steve did not move. He was in no humour to talk to anyone who might only have an idle fancy to discuss the prospects of there being a small herd of buffalo up in the Forks of the Red Deer, or, perhaps, only the state of the weather. The well-to-do-looking young man who was in the buggy uttered a hasty ejaculation of

annoyance at Steve's evident indifference, jumped from the buggy and came towards him.

"Hilloa, there, Steve!" he cried again.

Steve started as he recognized the voice, at the same time raising himself into a sitting position. For a second—only for a second—on Steve's face there had been a look of half-pleased recognition and something like expectancy; but, as he scanned the contemptuous expression on the face of the man who now looked so vexedly and disgustingly upon him, he was conscious of a curious sinking at his heart and a sense of repulsion—as if he were being held at arm's-length by a stranger, instead of being simply addressed by his own flesh and blood. Steve knew that his own conduct had largely contributed to this state of affairs; he felt in his heart that, in a worldly sense, his brother was quite justified in taking up this position. But if the latter approached him in the spirit of a stranger, then he must expect to be treated as such. He therefore said—

"Is that you, Paul, what's the matter now?"

As the elder brother looked upon the still handsome but somewhat dissipated face of the younger, something akin to pity stirred within him; their

widely different positions were lost sight of, even the cause of their estrangement and its attendant annoyances ceased to rankle in his breast. And with that lightning-like rapidity of thought, in which even a long life-time can be lived over again in a moment, he had a vision. He saw two little simple, but guilty-looking schoolboys, wandering down the banks of a wimpling creek. They were armed with long sticks which had mysteriously-constructed three-pronged forks attached to their extreme ends; their bosoms glowed with the pleasures of anticipation at the thought of the "suckers" they would spear, so much so indeed that the recollection of that terrible Nemesis in the shape of the outraged schoolmaster they would have to face on the morrow, was only a secondary consideration just then. For a moment—as before, only for a moment—the very ghost of that spirit of proud fraternal mentorship he had exercised—not unsuccessfully either—over that wayward younger brother in those early days, stirred within him, causing him to feel a glow of something kindly and human. But it faded away again as the harsh fierce light of the world with its narrower views and more selfish and sordid aims asserted itself; in an instant that which might, figuratively,

have plucked a brand from the burning had vanished, and Paul Ironside, the man of the world and the successful trader, stood in its place.

"You've been at it again, Steve!" said Paul. "It's no use telling you what a confounded idiot you are!—I've told you often enough. Good God! man, doesn't the misery you have to suffer more than counterbalance any little maudlin fun you may have with the boys down at Brady's? Do you think for one minute that the game's worth the candle? But look here, Steve!" and here he looked very determined indeed, pursing his lips, pushing his hands very deep down into his trousers pockets, and looking like—what he indeed was in his own eyes—the personification of outraged respectability. "I think if you had the slightest degree of respect for your own name, and the standing of your kith and kin, you'd clear out of Calumet and carry on your games somewhere else. Now, if you'll only go, look here, I'll do the handsome: I'll give you a decent rig-out and a matter of twenty-five dollars besides."

"To the devil with your rig-out and your twenty-five dollars!" cried the younger brother, suddenly springing to his feet, and facing his senior with a

peculiarly angry light in his eyes. There was no suspicion of any physical sickness about him now. He continued in a somewhat less excited manner, but still as if labouring under strong and conflicting feeling which at last he could no longer restrain. "Your respectability indeed!—and you value it at twenty-five dollars! Damn your impudence!"

The elder brother held up his hands as if in pious horror at this most uncalled-for mode of address in which the abandoned prodigal indulged, but the latter continued—

"You think more of your own ten-cent respectability and your canting, Pharisaical sky-pilot than you do of the Jesus Christ you're so fond of mouthing about. You church folk would kill Him if He came to earth again and didn't happen to have a decent coat on His back. You're worse than hypocrites, for you make your talk of Him a thing to cover your neglect of those whom He said most needed help. . . . No, I'll not hold my tongue, and I'll have it out with you, right here."

The elder brother had made a feeble attempt to call the outspoken one to a fitting sense of the reverence due to the handling of the subject.

“Yes, I know that a boozing ne’er-do-well like me has little right to speak—being only one of the lost sheep—but let me tell you, I’d sooner be what I am—a useless vagabond, than a whited sepulchre any day. Your Jesus Christ can’t say I traded on His name, anyhow! Oh, no; once upon a time when I was quite a respectable young man, and wore a good black coat on my back, and went to Meeting-house on Sundays, you church folk—I was one myself then—were greatly concerned about my soul and my spiritual happiness: you were anxious to keep me in the church—and on your books. But as soon as I began to go down hill, and you saw there was more to be made by giving me a shove in that direction than by keeping such a black sheep in your very respectable fold; why, you did it, and there was an end on’t. . . . I deserved it. But don’t come telling me that Christ came to save sinners—*I know that as well as you do.* What is more, if He came to-morrow He’d look for them in the churches—that’s where the most polished of the breed are!”

The Prodigal paused for a minute as if his long and unwonted speech had somewhat tired him. Then, he put his hand to his head; finding that

he was minus a hat he ran his fingers through his long hair, and speculated as to whether he had brought one with him or not. He was not quite certain upon this point; but still, with the cunning of a man who has tasted of the lees of life, he forbore looking around lest he should give himself away—not that it mattered a great deal to him, but with all his wild reckless ways there had always been one little sensitive spot in his heart. He really did not want to pain his brother with gratuitous and unnecessary proofs of his degradation. But that respectable individual's open contempt and neglect of him; moreover, his having given certain contracts within the last few days to comparative strangers (whose votes, however, would be of peculiar value to him in municipal matters), while he—his own brother—was in actual need of bread, had stung him into speaking his mind regarding the much-vaunted religion of the particular church to which he had once, and his brother now, belonged. But still, in his heart, he knew that his denunciation of others did not lessen his own sense of guilt, neither did he wish that his brother should think that he considered it did. From this it may be argued that there was still a smouldering spark

of self-respect left within him. When he spoke again it was in a somewhat quieter and more respectful voice :

"Look here, Paul," he continued, "I daresay you meant well offering to give me that twenty-five dollars ; but I'm not going to take it on the terms you suggest. You'd have consulted your respectability better if you'd have put a little bit of work in my way now and again ; but you'd sooner give it to any mealy-mouthed stranger who'd give you a little taffy at times, than to your own brother who would at the worst only tell you the truth. You keep your money—you've made dad's old business hum, and you deserve credit for it—but save your hoary old saws and your sage advice for those whose pay reconciles them to putting up with them. Let's have no more words, Paul. Good-day !"

And with this adieu, Steve turned on his very much-worn heel, and regardless of the fact that his hat was lying conveniently on a little tussock of sage-brush, walked away into the hot sun bare-headed, with a supreme disregard for personal comfort, appearances, and consequences.

"Well, I'm damned !" exclaimed the worthy

Paul, when he realized that he—the most successful business man in Calumet—had just received an unexpected rebuke from one of the most godless ne'er-do-wells in that circumspect town. Doubtless, a haunting and disagreeable suspicion that there was some slight note of truth in what Steve had said, made it all the more difficult to bear. But, just then, he remembered some of the encomiums that the worthy shepherd of the flock, the Reverend Thomas Clarkson, had passed upon him at a meeting of the church managers only a couple of nights before; and in another minute he had worked himself into a state of virtuous indignation at Steve's shameless effrontery. He, however, resolutely kept in the background the suspicion that had risen up in his mind at the meeting aforesaid—that the Reverend Thomas Clarkson's eulogies were so much bait cast upon the waters of speculation by the politic fisher of men. The truth was, the latter wanted a lean-to added to the manse kitchen, and a new wall-paper in the front parlour; moreover, Paul Ironside was the man to see that the matter was pushed through, so he baited his hook with Paul's particular weakness—flattery, and caught him. The man who is greedy of flattery is like a hungry

pike that sees but recks not of the barbs. In less than a fortnight Brother Collins had run up the lean-to, while a new wall-paper with a lovely peony rose on it as large as a man's hat, was blooming in the front parlour.

It was certainly a regrettable circumstance that such a respectable and prominent pillar of the church as Paul Ironside, should give utterance to expressions savouring of blasphemy even under trying provocation. Had he been overheard by the Reverend Thomas Clarkson, or indeed any of the members of his flock, they would have been very properly shocked and grieved by such a lapse from grace on their worthy brother's part. In the end, however, they would have attached the blame to Steve, and excused Paul by saying that such a sinful exhibition of perversity on Steve's part was enough to make any saint swear.

But let no one judge Paul altogether according to Steve's lights, for the latter looked upon him with the eyes of a disappointed man; there was bitterness in his heart, and his vision was jaundiced. Moreover, he had himself brought about this state of affairs; he had been a fool, and he knew it: this—knowing one's self to be a fool—is ten times

harder to bear than being called one by the world at large. He was by nature sensitive, so that once having departed from grace he was a derelict for ever in his own eyes, as well as in those of the world. He had imagined, after his first not particularly appalling "break," that it was useless trying to set himself right again in the eyes of his little social circle. But here he erred, for it is a social paradox, particularly noticeable in young communities, that "the world" has ever a species of sneaking regard for the prodigal, and is in time of need more inclined to extend to him a helping hand than it is to his circumspect brother. This is because, generally speaking, the former is possessed of a more interesting individuality, and the latter is, as often as not, a little too much of an adept at helping himself.

As for Paul, however, he was a well-meaning man ; he acted "squarely" in all his dealings with his fellows ; he was a bachelor ; led a blameless life ; was a bright and shining light in the church of the United Christian Brethren ; but he had become too quickly rich, and he could not stand prosperity. He had been flattered by mercenary-minded and canting hangers-on, till at last he had begun to

believe that he was the living embodiment of all the virtues which these interested ones ascribed to him. A love of popularity and susceptibility to flattery were his weak points, shrewd business man that he was. He was to a certain extent the victim of circumstances; the world had largely spoiled a heart that was not without many good and highly creditable aspirations. Even now, could he only have rated the tenets of the world at their proper value, he might have been a power for good in Calumet. As it was, people laughed at him behind his back, but openly deferred. There was much in the earlier days that he would have done for his younger brother; but after Steve's first serious lapse from grace he became impatient and intolerant of weaknesses that were not in his own nature and which he could not understand. He came to believe that he was indeed a very hardly-used man, seeing that his respectability and position as a leading member of the church suffered somewhat by the reputation of his carelessly living brother. Then he began to publicly repudiate and openly denounce. He quite forgot that Steve had neither possessed the same qualifications as himself, nor yet received the same chances. Anyhow, as riches came

to Paul, and all spoke fairly well of him, he began to fancy that, beyond doubt, he was made of something superior to the common clay. He discovered virtues in his moral composition—integrity, self-restraint, perseverance, and other qualities for which he neither gave Providence nor circumstances any credit. In fact, he began to talk of himself as a “self-made” man and to set up as a public mentor. As for the precept regarding the forgiving one’s brother till seventy times seven, that he looked upon as a “counsel of perfection,” and therefore not applicable to his own individual case. So it is that even “self-made” men deceive themselves.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAUGHTER OF EVE.

IT was the fall of the year, about the middle of October, and the little pioneer town of Calumet was beginning to prepare for the long winter that might set in any day. Sleighs and jumpers had been hauled from under dilapidated sheds, and the runners looked to; the citizens had begun to bank up their houses with earth or manure, according to their various fancies, and preparations as for a siege were in progress. There was no Canadian Pacific Railway within many weary miles of Calumet in those days. It stood on the edge of that great trackless prairie-land, to which adventurous men, trappers, traders, nondescripts, and others not quite so respectable, went down on horseback and in waggons; some of them never to return. It was

a fascinating land, that Wild West, savouring of romance and mystery. Many a "white-headed" boy it had lured from a fond mother's side, and swallowed up like the insatiable Moloch that it was. Strange, is it not, that in our nineteenth century boy there will assert itself at times the self-same spirit that animated our savage and nomadic ancestry—the spirit that led certain Biblical personages to wander with their flocks and herds into the wilderness, and to which in these days we owe the great explorers and discoverers of new worlds.

But disquieting rumours had just come from certain parts of the North-West. The *metis* (half-breeds) had been made dissatisfied and stirred up into a condition that bordered on rebellion by a vain-glorious and blood-thirsty fanatic called Louis Riel, and large numbers of the Cree and Blackfoot Indians were trembling in the balance of allegiance and open warfare in their relations with the white man. Indeed, so serious had the situation become that the government had despatched from Ottawa a certain important official, whose object was to preserve a pacific attitude, and report on the condition of the half-breeds and Indians between Fort

Garry and Calumet. But Commissioner Macdonald, when he had received his orders in Ottawa instructing him to proceed to the Territories without delay, was rather amused than otherwise at what he considered the altogether uncalled-for despatch of the mission. What was to be feared from a parcel of ignorant and primitively-armed half-breeds and Indians? The good folk down in Ottawa, Kingston, and Quebec, living in an atmosphere of red-coats, brass buttons, and cannon balls, could not realize such a thing as danger to any of the lieges, more particularly when those lieges were more than a thousand miles away; and they themselves had more often seen the savage red man wearing an old stove-pipe hat and a ragged, buttonless frock-coat, than clad in all the terrible majesty of warpaint and feathers. With some the law of association was too strong to admit of a whiskey-drinking, card-playing savage being transformed into a dangerous and desperate foe. As for the half-breeds; why, had not some of their oldest families Indian blood in their veins, which showed more particularly in the case of the women in the peculiar bluish-black tinge of the hair, and in the slightly Mongolian set of the large and beautiful brown eyes—there

was nothing so very terrible about them. The idea was absurd! Those Nor'-Westers were surely easily scared. There were a number of tender-foots in the country now that the railway was tapping it, and doubtless they were alarming themselves quite unnecessarily. Nor can anyone blame the good Canadian people for thinking thus. In reality they were neither callous nor careless in regard to the threatened rising. It was just possible that the circumscribed language of red-tapeism, as demonstrated in the reports of the North-West Mounted Police on the subject, had failed to express the proper gravity of the situation. Indeed, when the time came to prepare for action, no people in any country in the world ever responded to a call to arms more spontaneously and eagerly than did the Canadians. (All honour to you, sturdy young maple-crowned daughter; your own kith and kin across the water do not forget how you came to help on the Nile in '85.)

Commissioner Macdonald, however, remembering the fiasco of the first rebellion, and thinking of the tolerably civilized white population that was now in the country, and the comparative ease and luxury of that admirable means of transportation,

the Canadian Pacific Railway, soon came to the conclusion that as there really was no danger, he might as well make a pleasure trip of it as not. He was a widower with an only child, his daughter Ruth, who when she heard that her father was about to take the cars for the North-West, gave him no peace until he had consented to take her with him. There surely was no danger, in these prosaic days, of the red man going on the war-path again. Oh, no, the wily savage knew on which side his bread was buttered; or, in other words, he hankered after the flesh-pots of the pale-face, and he was paid his treaty money regularly.

Ruth Macdonald, though she did not court popularity, was a noted figure in Ottawa society, and this is no mere idle compliment to a woman. Perhaps it would hardly be fair to compare the relative merits, so far as physical charms are concerned, of women on the North American continent with women in the old world. They are indeed like stars that belong to different constellations; each group of heavenly bodies has its own particular modifying influences; each has its own particular luminaries difficult of comparison, and each in its own way shines just as brightly as the other. Ruth Macdonald

was a girl with that piquant, subtle charm of face and manner that defies all ordinary attempts at description. She was four-and-twenty, that age which unites some of the naiveté and freshness of girlhood with the fuller promise and dignity of womanhood. There was a man, with some pretensions to wisdom, who averred that no woman who unites these qualities need consider herself plain. He might have added to his reputation had he said that not one woman in a thousand ever does consider herself without some attraction, and he could have gone further, and said it was well it was so. As for Commissioner Macdonald's daughter, there could be no question about her attractiveness. She was a slip of a girl, with great changeful hazel eyes, a cheek that was somewhat brown with the sun's kiss, a rare wealth of heavy, gleaming, brown tresses, a dainty figure, and with a way that was calculated to make the ways of most people—especially men—hers whenever she took it into her shapely little head. There might have been many women in Canada whose faces and figures were more faultlessly beautiful, but there could have been but few who possessed her individuality. By reason of her unconventional ways, it was an open question

amongst many as to whether she was more saint or sinner.

Commissioner Macdonald had only feebly protested when his daughter had signified her intention of accompanying him. He knew perfectly well indeed that the more he protested, the more she would insist on accompanying him—and she did.

After they had reached Winnipeg, and left the cars, they did the rest of the journey in light spring waggons; and with the glorious weather of these sunny prairie-lands, they made excellent time. The Commissioner made several detours, and ascertained that there was no immediate cause for alarm in regard to the half-breeds and Indians. At the close of a fine day, late in the fall, they arrived at the little town of Calumet nestling in the valley of the Saskatchewan, looked down upon by great brown precipitous banks of clay, over the brink of which peeped the glaucous-hued sage-brush and the golden tufts of withered prairie grass. The only house they could rent furnished was, of course, a wooden one, and limited in regard to accommodation; but the Commissioner was promised a much better house and offices across the river whenever it froze. He

had been directed to make Calumet his headquarters for a few months, in order to report more fully upon the condition of affairs. This exactly suited Ruth. True, she would miss the dances at Government House, and other houses not less palatial, not to speak of tobogganing parties and other dissipations dear to the feminine nature; but then, was she not now on an expedition that to the lively mind of the romantically inclined girl was an ideal one; one that appealed peculiarly to her many-sided nature. For while Ruth Macdonald, like many more of her kind, with the restless spirit of the age and its craving after strange experiences, would fain have looked upon things from a coldly critical and analytical standpoint, the fact of her being a woman somewhat militated against her successfully carrying out this programme. This little difficulty of being unable to change her sex is what always stands in the way of the would-be new woman. For example, there was the purely romantic phase of the situation which appealed to what was the more potent side of her character. Moreover, her thirst for novel and out-of-the-way experiences would have an opportunity of being gratified, and she would be able for a while to throw

aside her dignity as Commissioner Macdonald's daughter, and live as one of the people; she would have an opportunity of studying the many strange types and new phases of life with which she would come in contact. This was something for which she had long wished; there was just enough of the spirit of old Mother Eve in her to make these resolves peculiarly congenial. She was at least truthful and natural, perhaps too much so. One cannot disregard the opinion of the world and Mrs. Grundy altogether; if one does, one generally has to pay for it in some shape or form. But Ruth cared as little for the world as for Mrs. Grundy; as little as one whose conscience is clear, and who has nothing to fear, usually does. It is the sinner who treats the world deferentially, and is positively chivalrous to Mrs. Grundy, who has, generally speaking, most to fear.

Ruth Macdonald, for the first few days after her arrival, had her curiosity aroused and interest stimulated by the various receptions organized in her honour by the élite of Calumet. She sat in divers front parlours, fearfully and wonderfully upholstered, where round the room were ranged with mathematical exactness a number of uncomfortable-looking

straight-backed chairs, on which sat equally uncomfortable but promising young men, gaily-bedecked females, in garments that never in their entirety figured on any fashion plates, but which had been evolved from the fertile imaginations of their owners, and from vague recollections (rescued piecemeal) of striking costumes seen, perhaps, on a rare visit to Winnipeg. The effect of such was in some cases so startling that they filled the mind of the beholder with wonder and awe. But, upon the whole, the company was lively; western company usually is; its environment begets a spontaneity and freedom of speech and action that in older countries, where tradition and conventionality hedge round social intercourse, would be deemed very bad form indeed. These good western folk did not merely sit round the room trying to look good, as they do in some rural districts of the old country, but they consumed unlimited cake and pie, and canvassed the most sacred affairs of their neighbours with the utmost unreserve and most delightful ingenuousness. Moreover, these good folk knew nothing of that stereotyped and hackneyed form of speech that passes in some older and more civilized communities for conversation; their flights of fancy were untrammelled,

and usually took a refreshingly original and picturesque turn that delighted one either by its subtlety or its boldness.

This was a charming condition of things to Ruth Macdonald, whose soul had often dreamed of a Utopian society such as this, where people said and did just exactly such things as they pleased. When on her first appearance at one of these receptions some of the uncomfortable-looking young men aforesaid discovered that the grand and fashionable young lady from Ottawa was just as human in her ways as themselves, they unbent, and proved, in many cases, much more amusing, and infinitely more intellectual, than some of the gilded youth of her own social sphere, whose sole aim seemed to be to support life without perishing altogether from *ennui*. It was an intellectual treat to the girl, this studying the many types and phases of a new life.

One of the young men who interested her not a little was Paul Ironside, although there was perhaps in him less of the unconventional freedom of speech and action than in some of the other young men. Moreover, there was a latent power and a masterful way about him which, if it did not create admiration,

at least commanded a certain amount of respect. Paul Ironside was prosperity and respectability personified. He was a good type of the pushing, self-reliant, and self-made western man—the man who was a shining light in Meeting-house, and a dazzling one in the little commercial world to which he belonged. It struck Ruth Macdonald as a most exquisite joke when a certain somewhat sentimental brown-eyed little maid hesitatingly confided to her the expectation that she—the Ottawa belle—would now probably succeed in capturing Calumet's particular prize; for what chance could they have against one like her, who seemed to them the personification of all the graces. But Ruth had only to look at the self-important Paul one moment to realize the absurdity and impossibility of such a contingency. Yet, strangely enough, because this social magnate was accredited with having the biggest scamp in Calumet for his brother, he was not without a certain degree of interest. It was food for reflection to note that such anomalies in families were not peculiar to the upper classes.

Ruth, still in an enquiring frame of mind regarding this social paradox, asked the brown-eyed unsophisticated one regarding this brother, and her informant,

in a burst of confidence, admitted that, in reality, though Steve was generally known as "The Prodigal," he was a much more popular man than Paul. Indeed it was Steve who had once risked his own life when he had plunged into the ice-cold Saskatchewan and saved her younger brother, who had been upset out of a small boat, and brought him safely to shore. After that praiseworthy deed, which the Prodigal characteristically made light of—to tell the truth, he swore in forcible and picturesque language at the boy's father for having prayed for the rescuer in Meeting-house—he had been an object of considerable interest to the good Calumet people. Indeed, several members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union had suddenly evinced quite an extraordinary interest in him, but Steve had persistently refused to be driven into their fold. He had said, with reprehensible but good-natured candour, that their good shepherd, the Reverend Thomas Clarkson, put him more in mind of a wolf in sheep's clothing than anything else. Now this was unjust, and "did" for Steve, for it came to the reverend gentleman's ears, and, to do the latter justice, he did not go behind anyone's back to say what he thought. They seldom do out west.

There was something in the manner of the confiding, brown-eyed maid when telling this that struck the good-hearted, shrewd girl of the world.

"Did *you* never try to do anything with him?" she asked.

"*I*—do anything with *him*!" repeated the girl strangely, as if her thoughts were busy with a side issue of the question. "I wonder what he'd think if I tried?—besides, he won't as much as look at me!"

A tell-tale blush mounted into the girl's face and neck, as she clutched and held somewhat nervously the hand that Ruth Macdonald placed quietly into hers, as if as a sign that she was understood.

Yes, my masters, only another of those complex and pathetic little incidents that creep into our commonplace lives, to throw around them a halo of romance, and to thrill humanity with that all-potent touch which makes slaves alike of the queen on the throne and the beggar maid.

Maybe it was this conversation that made the young lady from Ottawa curious to have a look at Steve Ironside, who, she concluded, would be interesting to her as embodying a type of the western

prodigal. But it is more than likely that it was only because her surroundings were already beginning to lose their freshness for her, that she thought of this new interest at all.

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE GOD.

THE Reverend Thomas was "giving it them hot." They often got it hot, the sheep of his particular fold ; but they seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise : they liked their spiritual fare served up in an appetizing and spicy way. The monotony of their lives, and their comparative isolation from the busy outside world, forced them to take to some form of distraction, or they took refuge in religion, which, according to their lights, meant something exciting and stimulating.

But the weather was cold, the quicksilver having dropped to zero ; the mighty Saskatchewan was frozen over, and the snow lay ankle-deep on the prairie. It was, however, not chilly inside the bare little wooden-walled Meeting-house, which, on a certain Sunday night in November, contained a fairly

good congregation. Indeed, had not the great billets of wood crackled right cheerily in the stoves, and the almost red-hot stove-pipes hummed with the rush of heated air, the Reverend Thomas would have kept their minds from straying to such a trivial detail as an uncomfortably low temperature, as in his discourse he dealt with a place where the temperature was one of more than tropical sultriness, and to which, he declared, some of his hearers must necessarily go unless they took heed to their ways. Indeed, at this stage of his discourse, such a hold had he gained over some of them, that the obliging Sammy Moffat, who had undertaken to keep the stoves going, forgot to stoke-up, the result being that the fires nearly went out, and the stove-pipes creaked ominously as they contracted under the lowered temperature. But despite all this, it would have been safe to assume, so graphic and realistic were the preacher's descriptive powers, that some of the more emotional members of the congregation actually perspired freely, and felt their surroundings decidedly uncomfortable.

Despite the cynical way in which Steve, and several other degenerate spirits, spoke of the Reverend Thomas Clarkson's startling and some-

what sensational method of gaining the attention of his congregation, it would be doing the latter a gross injustice to say that he was not actuated by perfectly sincere motives in his method of administering his duties. It was a way certainly that would have savoured of burlesque, and have done much more harm than good in a more enlightened and older settled community, but in a raw, excitement-loving western one, where varied influences were at work, and a new order of things prevailed, it certainly gained a hold upon the class it was addressed to, where a quieter and seemingly more rational method would have failed. It was generally conceded, however, that the reverend gentleman was no fool. He was a good judge of human nature, and, therefore, did not want in tact when dealing with his somewhat fickle flock. When, for instance, he had rated soundly, or even openly denounced, in Meeting-house, some unusually recalcitrant member, he was not above waiting upon the hapless one the very next day, and, uninvited, advising him upon some worldly project with a degree of shrewdness and business acumen that always made his opinion invaluable. If, as some said, he knew on which side his bread was buttered, because he always buttered

it on both sides, they never could charge him with any specific act of meanness. His mistake lay in applying the same spiritual remedies to all his pastoral patients alike ; he preached peace and goodwill with an uncompromising zeal that was worthy of an old crusader.

On the platform, alongside the Reverend Thomas, an American organ stood, at which presided the rather good-looking brown-eyed girl spoken of in the preceding chapter. It is a fact worthy of mention that in country churches it is the better-looking members of both sexes that contribute most to the musical part of the programme—witness a village choir, for instance ; is not the name Legion of the romances woven about the pretty, modest rustic beauty who sings therein ? In one of the side seats sat Paul Ironside, staid and respectable-looking as usual. He sat where he could see—much, it must be confessed, to his surprise and satisfaction—the daughter of Commissioner Macdonald as she sat on one of the benches against the wall, and near to the door. It was quite evident that she was immensely interested, and relished the Reverend Thomas' realistic pictures, for there was an appreciative look in her eyes that one could see took some exercise

of will-power to keep within bounds. But more wonderful still, almost opposite her, in an obscure corner of the room—also very near the door—sat Paul's brother Steve. He sat very quietly indeed, and with a strangely unfamiliar, shame-faced look upon his thin, sun-browned features. There was no question as to Steve's face being a striking one; it was the sort of face which, seen in a crowded street, would attract and rivet the attention. It was not a merely physically handsome face, but a face with a striking individuality in it; it showed the stamp, the indescribable impress, of a stirring career and a wide knowledge of men and things, despite its somewhat weary and world-worn expression. Well might he be shame-faced, the righteous ones who saw him that night thought; for it was the first time he had been seen in a place of worship for many years.

To do Paul Ironside justice, he was, if somewhat surprised, heartily glad to see his brother there. But he committed a grave error. It came about in this way. The Reverend Thomas, having finished his discourse on hell (he had wound up artistically with a regular pyrotechnic display of oratory), suddenly asked if one of the brethren would pray, when

Paul, after a modest pause, knelt, and in a firm and clear voice began.

Paul Ironside was a perfectly sincere man, but he did not understand human nature, or, at least, the tact required to deal with some natures. It was very evident after his first few words that he was praying for his brother. He referred to him as "the lost sheep that had wandered from the fold," and hoped that "certain signs of regeneration might be lasting and productive of good."

Now, when a man in praying forgets the spirit and object of his prayer in the unction and sense of self-satisfaction that is born of an unfailing flow of language and a beautifully-cut orthodoxy, he might just as well curse openly the man or woman he prays for, for all the good he does.

With strict regard to the truth, it was not difficult to account for Steve's presence at Meeting-house that night. No, it was not a case of the soul's awakening or anything half so interesting; it was only hail-fellow-well-met Brother Isaac Watts, who had in a friendly spirit, free from all cant and humbug, prevailed upon Steve to come to church, and, as he somewhat irreverently expressed it, "listen to the new organ and old Clarkson piling it on." That

was "brother Watts'" way of putting things, for he was a long-headed man as well as a good Christian.

It was, of course, not a remarkable thing that during the progress of Paul's prayer many pairs of eyes looked between judiciously distributed fingers at Steve, to see what effect such an exemplary and praiseworthy petition to the Deity had upon the wretched object of it.

As it was, there were only two persons present who did not conform to the conventional posture while at prayers, and they remained seated, but with heads slightly bent forward, or with hands resting lightly on knee or chin. These two persons were Ruth Macdonald and Steve Ironside.

During the progress of the meeting, the eyes of the young lady from Ottawa had once or twice, when carelessly scanning the heads of such members of the congregation as happened to be in her immediate neighbourhood, become conscious of a pair of eyes fixed upon hers. They struck her as being remarkable eyes, utterly unlike those belonging to any one she had ever met. Moreover, the possessor of them had a peculiarly striking face, one which betokened no ordinary character, one which

contained a hint of strength and also of weakness — the weakness of one who is his own worst enemy.

So at least Ruth thought as the gazer turned them quickly away from her face, as if he felt he had no right to stare at any one in such a fashion. One or two thoughts had been borne home to the girl's mind as she had carelessly looked upon Steve's face. One was that he was entirely a different kind of man from the rest of the rather commonplace men present ; another was, that he was by no means bad-looking, and bore the stamp of individuality about him, which, whether for good or evil, was at least not cast in a tame and conventional mould.

These fancies of Ruth Macdonald's were strange ones to take amid such prosaic surroundings ; but she took them all the same, nor could she somehow get rid of them. Indeed, in another minute, she found herself looking over again in his direction, and, as it happened, he was looking at her. Of course their eyes met, and for a second or two seemed to rivet and hold each other in that remarkable challenging, soul-searching gaze with which utter strangers of the opposite sex will sometimes regard one another for no reason whatever that has

been explained by mortal man, and which, so far as human knowledge goes, no one is able to avoid when the time comes for it. That gaze may pass between a prince and a peasant maid—it is supremely indifferent to relative positions such as rank and wealth ; it may end there and never come to anything, but it leaves a mark as indelible as that which the hand of Time stamps on the brow of beauty and all earthly things : a potent presentiment which may haunt the inner consciousness when the outward form is dim to the mind's eye.

Surely, it was a strange place, and they were an oddly assorted pair—the Ottawa belle and the vagabond Ishmael of Calumet—to indulge in such a look. It was a most reprehensible, unaccountable and silly thing to do ; but the little god that rules the hearts and lives of wayward mortals had willed it so—it was written in the Book, and there was an end of it.

Ruth Macdonald shivered for a moment in that warm atmosphere in an unaccountable fashion, and with an almost petulant toss of her head drew her eyes away from those hazel ones that had looked into hers so curiously. Were they both dreaming ? What had happened ? Only that Paul's prayer had

come to an end and neither had heard a word. Seeming irony of fate! The one who was prayed for, and who was, perhaps, in the thoughts of every person in that Meeting-house, was himself supremely unconscious of the fact, and of the brother's prayer that had just gone up for him! Inscrutable Providence! But doubtless it was better so. Who knows but if he had heard it, his soul might have rebelled at such an attempt upon its regeneration? As it was, while the organ was droning out a prelude to an anthem, which the choir was just about to inflict upon the long-suffering congregation, there happened to Steve something that was unique in his experience.

It was as if his brother's prayer had indeed exercised some subtle influence over him, for he saw, as with the eyes of another, his own worthless and unregenerate self. He saw his wasted life, his mis-spent years, his shabby clothes, his tarnished name—in short, he saw himself as the vagabond of Calumet. He saw in a new light that sense of rebelliousness, the outcome of disappointment, and, doubtless, not a little envy, that had possessed him in the past. And then and there he said with characteristic feeling—for habit can become second nature—but

under his breath, "Oh, what a damned fool I've been!"

Now, no true or sane man ever sneers at the efficacy of prayer, but, at the same time, it was not Paul's prayer that had brought about this miracle or sudden species of awakening in the prodigal. Could anyone in that Meeting-house have known what had taken place—what a change in the current of Steve's life had come about, as it were, in the twinkling of an eye, they would have considered it little short of a miracle. And, truly, the age of miracles is not yet past; for, as long as two souls can challenge each other through eyes of dust, shall miracles be.

The anthem came to an end. Someone had stoked up the stoves afresh, with the result that the great black piping, that ran through the entire length of the church, creaked ominously as it expanded with the heat. The stoves themselves hummed like veritable locomotive furnaces, and the fresh billets of wood split and crackled with a right mirthful sound.

What was the matter with the Ishmael of Calumet that he moved as one in a dream, and kept watching the fierce light that glowed through the openings in

the stove as if he saw strange visions there? Only that he indeed saw visions. He saw his dead self, and was filled with a strange apathetic brooding over his wasted life—what a horrible nightmare that life seemed to him now! But that did not last long, for again he became conscious that the eyes of the young lady from Ottawa were rivetted upon him. What folly was this? What had indeed come over her? Was she, who had kept a fairly tight rein on her emotional nature for five Ottawa seasons, going to allow it to be disturbed now in a place like Calumet, and, moreover, in a Western Meeting-house? Suddenly some other part of her complex woman's nature came to her aid, making her do a most unaccountable thing. She honoured the wondering Ishmael with an angry stare, and then smiled as if it mattered not what he saw or thought. Steve, however, met that stare and smile as if he saw not them but something that lay beyond.

In another second the girl pulled herself together, moved with a sudden fear at what she had done: angry with herself at what she had betrayed—whatever it was. The unintelligible groans and the pious “amens” of the emotional little congregation failed to amuse her now.

Another pause, and the worshippers fidgeted, and looked at each other expectantly: the *coup de grâce* weekly administered by the Reverend Thomas would come about within the next few minutes. In that brief pause the emotional natures of several excitable females were worked up to a dangerous pitch, so much so as to suggest hysteria. And yet these things neither affected the young lady from Ottawa nor Stephen Ironside in the very least. They both seemed to be emerging into consciousness again from out some peculiarly realistic dream. The zealous divine prepared to test in a practical fashion the faith, or otherwise, of the individual members of his congregation. He did it in a manner common enough in Methodist circles. He said:

“All you who are saved stand up and come forward!”

Promptly, three plain-featured and dowdy females of uncertain age rose to their feet, and gazed around as if with a happy consciousness of the fact that at least no one could impugn the moral rectitude of their lives.

At this stage of the proceedings, Sammy Moffat, a little bachelor of chivalrous predilections, and also of uncertain age, who sat in one of the back seats

alongside a stove, so far forgot himself and the occasion as to wink surreptitiously to another old bachelor in a way that was full of unfathomable wisdom. Sammy reckoned the three were perfectly safe.

Then the schoolmaster arose, and after him slowly Paul Ironside. Then the disreputable town "wood-and-water-Joe" rose to his feet. This individual regularly became converted once a year, and after a month's violent bemoaning over his wasted life, and preparation by prayer and temporary abstinence to begin an exemplary new one, would suddenly start again upon a series of wild debauches that would last for eleven months, and until the time came round to get re-converted.

"Now, stand up and move forward all you who want to be saved," persisted the perfectly sincere but unnecessarily particular and ever-zealous divine as he gazed upon the congregation composedly with his searching dark eyes. To do him justice, he did not dream but that every one present would seize this opportunity of testifying to their interest in the subject in question.

Slowly, one after another, like a flock of sheep, the members of the little congregation rose in an

undecided sort of fashion, forbearing to look at one another save in a painfully shy and furtive manner.

All save two, and these two were not accustomed to parading their religious beliefs. Indeed, to tell the truth, it struck them that it was an unwise and unnecessary challenge on the part of the spiritual guide. For if it was not to derive some spiritual benefit, what was the reason of their being there? If they did happen to be there out of curiosity, would it not have been by far the best policy to have let them alone? Did he want them to make hypocrites of themselves? Did it not almost savour of an insult to their intelligence to assume that they could only be driven like a flock of sheep?

Ruth Macdonald and Steve Ironside again glanced at each other, and remained seated. This time they looked in a somewhat questioning fashion, as if each were surprised to see the other sitting still, but, at the same time, as if glad to see that each was not quite alone. In another second a gleam of amusement shot into the eyes of the girl as she caught the somewhat sheepish but rebellious light in the eyes of Steve.

At least this stranger was no hypocrite. The rest

of the congregation seemed so wrapped up in their own importance that they hardly noticed the still seated pair. But the watchful eyes of the somewhat surprised preacher had seen the figure of a strange woman—he did not know it was Commissioner Macdonald's daughter, or he might not have committed himself as he did—and someone whom he could not exactly make out; for he said, in a voice in which there was just a suspicion of annoyance:

“Let us engage in prayer for the stiff-necked brother and sister.”

Now, if there was one vulnerable spot in the compositions of the two stiff-necked ones in question, it was their sense of humour. Therefore, to be prayed for in public by the autocratic pastor was more than either of them could endure just then; they could not listen without making exhibitions of themselves.

As if by some subtle tacit understanding, and before almost anyone had noticed or divined their intentions, Steve had moved quietly to the door, held it open, and allowed Ruth Macdonald to pass out. In another moment he drew the thick door behind them, and they stood in the wooden porch

of the church, in which there burned a smoky light in an oil lamp.

She tried to look as if nothing in particular had happened as she pulled up the deep collar of her seal-skin jacket, and drew on her beaver mitts. He placed on his head a capacious unplucked beaver cap, and drew on a pair of dog-skin gauntlets preparatory to venturing out into the cold.

They glanced at each other strangely, shyly, and then smiled.

She scanned his face curiously in the dim light; he met her gaze composedly enough as she asked him, in a voice that did not altogether savour of her accustomed self-possession :

“Aren’t you sorry you went in there?”

“Not a bit,” he replied promptly, but with that respectful tone which, in justice to him, be it said, he always adopted in his few and brief conversations with the opposite sex. Then with a slightly cynical sense of humour showing itself upon his face for the minute, “I’m very glad I went. The unexpected always appeals to me : I thought the Reverend Thomas was the last person in the world to give me a lift socially—but it was rough upon you being classed with such as myself.”

It was a bold speech, after all, for the Prodigal to make.

"Then you're not ashamed to own me for a 'stiff-necked sister'?" she asked, gaining confidence.

"Am I afraid of his hell?" rejoined the irreligious Prodigal, jerking his thumb in the direction of the little sanctuary, where a species of latter-day inquisition was in progress. "If I had to go to heaven with some of them that're in there, I'd see myself—" He stopped short with a look of horror on his face.

"Oh, hush! and in this place!" cried the girl with a look of annoyance, apparently real enough. "You must not be so bitter. Thank you. Good-night!"

"I really beg your pardon: I'm not accustomed to talking to women, and forget myself badly sometimes," explained Steve, humbly, as he opened the outer door of the porch and allowed her to pass out. But, at the same time, to the uninitiated it would have been difficult to say whether the repentant air upon his face savoured more of contrition than of amusement. In point of fact, it partook of both.

In another minute he stood outside in the moonlight—alone with the still, beautiful night, under

the star-studded sky, watching the tender violet-toned shimmer of the moon's rays on the snow that draped the prairie and the frozen bosom of the Saskatchewan—with all the weird beauty and serenity of a slumbering world around him—a divinely beautiful world, truly; and face to face with the ghost of his wasted past and his own tragic thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

“GOOD-NIGHT, MY FELLOW-SINNER!”

RUTH MACDONALD walked briskly on when she left the little church until she came to the banks of the river. Some few weeks before her father had taken a large, weather-boarded house that lay just across the Saskatchewan, on one of the two peninsulas nearly opposite the town of Calumet; and as the river was frozen over, affording an easy and good road to and fro all winter, it was preferable to living in the rather crowded little town.

Somehow Ruth had missed the footpath that led over the snow in the direction of the lower peninsula where the house stood, but still she kept walking on; it was surely impossible to miss the opposite bank. But when she had walked a little over half an hour, and the opposite bank began to rise up

before her and wear an unfamiliar aspect, she became alive to the fact that, somehow or other, she must have missed the second peninsula. Luckily the snow was only a few inches deep, and therefore it was comparatively easy walking. She retraced her steps, and followed up what she supposed was her proper side of the river bank; but the further she went, the stranger the banks appeared. She began to have an uneasy suspicion that she must have mistaken her course, when the figure of a man loomed up in front of her. He came nearer and spoke. It was Steve Ironside.

"May I ask if you're going home?" he enquired somewhat bluntly.

For an instant she was unable to account for such a seemingly unnecessary question. Then it flashed across her mind that this was the natural result of her somewhat questionable behaviour in church. If she dispensed with the conventionalities as she did, especially with individuals of the opposite sex whom she did not know, what else was she to expect? Here now was a proof of it—this self-deluded Lothario of the Wild West presuming upon a fancied overture, and actually asking her if she was going home! It was a judgment upon

her, and although the girl was no prude—few Canadian girls are—she smarted momentarily under its sting. With a freezing urbanity that would have shrivelled up the most self-assured “down-east” young man into his boots, she remarked :

“I don’t think my movements can possibly interest you? But perhaps you mistook me for someone else, if so, there is no harm done.”

She had started to walk calmly past him before the words had died upon her lips.

She almost brushed against him in passing, looking coldly into his face, which showed clearly in the moonlight. Something in the intensity of its expression attracted her attention, and involuntarily made her stop short for a moment. What was the matter with the man? What had an outcast to do with an air of injured respectability, and what did these broken words mean which trembled and died upon his lips—as if he thought that, after all, they might as well be left unsaid?

“What is it?” she cried in spite of herself, and wondering at her own temerity.

“Only that I’m no end of a fool, and might have known better,” was the quiet reply. “But I did not ask you if you were going home because I

was personally interested. I thought you were going there, and that you must have missed your way. I might have known better than suppose you'd talk civilly to me a second time. I've much to learn yet about women. I'd no idea that anyone would care to visit such a dangerous spot at this time of night."

Surely it was not the scapegrace of Calumet who spoke to her with such a dignity and hint of irony in his voice!

A sudden presentiment seized her—a sense of impending shame and humiliation. "Am I not then going home?" she asked quickly.

"You are two miles below the town, on the wrong side of the river, and travelling in the wrong direction," he replied. "You are within one hundred yards of the rapids, where the ice is thin, and through which you will most assuredly go if you keep on as you are doing now. Do you see that small dark mark just over there?" He pointed to a little dark spot on the snow, no larger than a man's hand, that lay right in the direction in which she had been walking, and not ten yards off. "Well, the ice is not half an inch thick at that place; and there is a whirlpool beneath it, and a current that

runs at the rate of eight miles an hour. That is why I cut across the peninsula, seeing you were coming in this direction, thinking, perhaps, it was just possible you had mistaken your way in the moonlight, which always deceives one."

He paused a moment and regarded her coldly, but she did not utter a word. Only her eyes seemed unusually large and bright, and there was a droop about the corners of her mouth that was significant: her lips trembled as if she were at a loss for something to say. Now, Steve was not only a man of quick perceptions, but a generous-hearted one as well. He, however, somewhat misjudged the character of the girl, for he continued:

"If you think I feel riled at what you said, don't trouble about it. That's the road back. I'll go on ahead, and you can follow me. There's no one need see us; I can leave you before you get to the house, and we needn't talk."

He stopped abruptly, and it was his turn to stare surprisedly at his companion. Within the next minute the girl had revealed her true nature—had shown more of the inner workings of her generous if impulsive young mind to Calumet's particular prodigal than, perhaps, she had ever done before to

any human being. She had stepped up to him, placed one of her mitted hands lightly on his arm, looked into his face with eyes that were suspiciously bright, and said in a voice that was full of an impetuous contrition :

"Oh, what a fool I've been ! and what an ungrateful wretch you must take me for—but I deserve it. Will you take me home and let my father thank you? And would you mind giving me your arm? I do feel rather tired." The thought of the enormity of her mistake terrified her now.

She had spoken these broken sentences with a genuine burst of feeling ; and, moreover, she clung to him in a way that would have given a less level-headed man than Steve not a little cause for self-congratulation. She looked at that ominous dark spot on the snow-covered ice, and she realized what it meant—a swift, sure, and terrible death. She knew that but for the man who stood beside her, and his forethought, she might even now have been a lifeless thing, drifting down with the cold, black, swirling waters under the pitiless, gleaming prison-walls of ice. She shuddered as she thought of it, and for the moment gripped his arm more tightly. She misinterpreted his silence, and spoke again :

"Of course, I don't deserve that you should forgive me—it was such a cruel and stupid mistake on my part—I am always doing such dreadful things!"

But he recovered his power of speech and stopped her—he, the black sheep of the Calumet fold. As he took her hand in his own, and looked down into her face, Old Father Time took a step backwards—back to that time ere he had dreamt of taking his journey into a far country, and there wasting his substance in riotous living! All the tragic wild past had gone out of his life, and only his better, truer, and nobler self remained. The eyes with which he looked upon this girl were as pure, and as free from taint of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as those of a child that once lay in the arms of its mother, and which bore some likeness to himself even now.

"Come," he said, with a kindly cheerfulness, "it was a silly thing of me to scare you as I did. Well, if you do not mind taking my arm, of course you will find the walking ever so much easier. You must not talk like that when there's nothing to pardon—it's the only bit of good I've done for many a long day, and I'm gladder than I can tell you that I've

done it. Don't say a single word more about it; I can understand how it all happened. You must be tired after your long walk, but we can make back slowly. Now, don't you think it's more like being at a real church, out here under the stars, than being in that Meeting-house, listening to descriptions of impossible hells?"

Surely, in the vanished past, a strain of gentle blood must have somehow found its way into the Ironside family, and run down through it into the succeeding generations; for he who accompanied the magnate's daughter was now no longer the abject, despised, and reckless ne'er-do-well of Calumet, but a thoughtful, courteous, respectful man, who walked with head erect, as if he had been accustomed to the society of gentlefolk all his life. The eminently respectable Paul Ironside, who was the richest man in Calumet, would hardly have been at his ease in the position his scapegrace brother now occupied.

They walked some little distance without speaking; it seemed just then as if there was no need of words. The situation was rather odd, when one came to think of it, seeing they had not spoken to each other three hours before. At length she broke the interval of silence. It might have been

that the tranquil moonlight night had somewhat tinged her thoughts, for they were of a retrospective nature.

"Is it not strange to think," she remarked, musingly, "that only a few years ago this spot was one of the loneliest and wildest in 'The Great American Desert,' and that where Calumet now stands was the favourite meeting-place of the Indians, and where they held their annual 'sun-dances?'"

And then, as if forgetful of the individuality of the man who walked beside her, she went on to speak of the charm there must have been in the life the buffalo-hunters led in the old days, journeying as they did into the unknown, and meeting with all sorts of exciting adventures. She knew that all men were not alike, but she could understand the fascination such a life exercised over the man who had the love of Nature in him, and to whom the sky and the prairie were as living things, and never lost their freshness and interest; who had just enough of primitive man in his heart to answer to that instinct for a free, stirring, open-air existence, beside which the lives of those who lived in smoky, ugly cities and poky little towns were narrow and commonplace indeed.

Steve turned his head quickly and regarded the girl curiously. Was it she, the Ottawa belle, of all others, who had so unerringly put her finger upon one of the subtlest and least understood phases of his nature?—doubtless that which had been the beginning of the wild, nomadic life which he had led—which had been misunderstood, and had brought upon him such disrepute that at last he had grown careless, and even sinful, in many of his ways of living. It was a strange thing that one, a dweller in cities, whom he had looked upon as a species of fashionable butterfly, should understand such things; that she, of all the women whom he had ever met, should have chanced upon this responsive note in his nature—the chord that had hitherto constituted what poetry there was in his life.

In another moment he was no longer the prosaic Steve. He had become the nineteenth century Othello, with a subject as picturesque, as broad, and as fascinating as any that the Moor could have had at his disposal, and in the telling of it the man surpassed himself. He betrayed the rare and graphic touches of a born artist, for he knew how to tell a story. While showing himself a man of no mean powers of observation, and the possessor

of a heart that could feel as well as recognize the romantic side of things, his light but masterful way of handling his subject bore testimony to a subtly receptive mind. She hung upon his words as if brought under some powerful spell. When he recollected himself, and stopped abruptly, she bade him continue. This man, despite the note of depreciation when he referred to himself at all, had become almost a hero in her eyes. They were surely a strangely assorted pair, and it was a strange moonlight walk; but it came to an end, as all romantic things must do.

"But here is your house," he observed, "just on the top of the bank. If I have wearied you with some of those old-time stories, you must remember you brought them on yourself. One of my weaknesses is my liability to run on indefinitely whenever anyone talks about the prairie. You see, I'm not only a vagabond by nature, but I might say one by profession."

Had he been one of the most conventional of the gilded youth of Ottawa, she could not have treated this speech with more seeming indifference. The idea of such a man as he was assuming a modest rôle was, to her, almost amusing.

When she bade him follow her up the bank he accompanied her so far, then stopped as if to turn back.

"But you must come in," she insisted, with a genuine ring in her voice, "and let father thank you. You don't know for what? Oh, don't talk like that—I at least am in earnest!"

The man as he faced her with the strong moonlight shining full upon him, was a pathetic, tragic figure. The girl became uneasy when she saw that unhappy and almost hard expression on his face. It seemed as if he had again changed his personality, and become that nameless "something" which, in her naturally one-sided knowledge of the world, she associated simply with the Ishmaelite of society. She had caught a glimpse of such a look on his face when she had first seen him in the Meeting-house that night. She had not been a woman if a sudden wave of pity had not for the moment welled up within her, drowning the cold voice of reason in its kinder and more human flood. It was the old world-worn Steve that spoke now. There was even a hint of cynicism in his voice that jarred upon her.

"You are very good," he remarked, "but surely

you can't know who you are talking to. I shouldn't have let you take my arm; had you known who I was you'd have thought better of it. Did you never hear of Stephen or Steve Ironside, the Calumet scamp? I've been a first-class piece of stage property to the parsons here for the last eight years; they look upon me as their choicest terrible example. I wonder what your father, or the good folk in Calumet, would think if they knew that you'd been seen walking with me! But they'll never know, and perhaps you may be none the worse—"

He stopped abruptly, and it was his turn to look surprised. Truly, Calumet was not the only place in the world where there were women who had the courage of their own convictions.

"Know who you were!" she repeated, with a very genuine hint of resentment in her voice, "I thought you were more of a man than to talk to me like that! Of course I knew who you were, otherwise I might not have spoken to you as I did. Do you think because I've been what you might call a society woman, that I do not know the difference between womanliness and prudery, and cannot trust myself to act upon that knowledge? Now, I will explain my position, since your remarks have called

for some explanation, and I give you credit for enough common-sense not to misinterpret me. I do not object to one of your so-called sinners, provided he minds his own business, and does not purposely outrage the proprieties for the mere sake of shocking those who have some real regard for them; and provided he is liberal-minded enough to give a fellow-sinner credit for caring as little for a jealous and meddlesome Mrs. Grundy as he does himself. I think *you* might have done that much, Mr. Ironside. Now, will you come in?"

"I'm a fool," he stammered by way of reply, "and you're a—brick!" He looked at her awkwardly, and as if not quite sure that he had expressed himself properly. He hastened to repair his supposed blunder. "I beg your pardon; you see I'm not quite sure that I should have said a brick. The fact is, I'm not accustomed to talking to women, and so put my foot in it—"

"Then keep it there, and don't spoil a compliment," she interrupted laughingly. "Won't you come in and let my father thank you?"

"You're very good, only I met him going over towards Calumet when I came after you"—this with something that sounded suspiciously like a

sigh of relief.—“I’m real glad to have been of some little service to you. Here’s the house. Good-night!”

He lifted his beaver cap, and turned as if to go. But she would not have it so. She held out her hand to him, and said in a voice the sincerity of which there was no questioning:

“Good-night, and thank you much more than I can say for what you’ve done for me this night. I hope we may meet again. I am inclined to think that I might have been in worse company, though they did pray for you in church.” She paused, then laughingly added, “Good-night, my fellow-sinner.”

In another second she had gone, but the frank smile upon her face, when she concluded her farewell speech, stayed with him long after he had, like one who dreams, wended his way to Calumet again, over the snow-covered ice and under the star-lit heavens.

CHAPTER V.

THE ELDER SON WHO GRUDGED THE FATTED CALF.

THE winter passed as all winters pass in Calumet. There were dances, concerts, skating parties, not to mention many unfestive gatherings of the United Christian Brethren to pray for those weaker brothers and sisters who had slipped away again from their annual conversion, the social dissipations of Calumet having proved too much for them.

The Commissioner's daughter at first took part in the various local functions, and diagnosed them with infinite relish. When in Ottawa she had enjoyed the round of events indulged in by the better classes for their own ennui-killing and healthful sakes. But here, though to follow after such things was in a sense to descend several steps in the social ladder, she somehow felt that she had, so

far as her own individuality was concerned, progressed and risen. She had more time to think; she saw a less conventional life; its phases were obvious; her mental vision was cleared so that she could understand aright many social questions that had before perplexed her; and her views of things in general gained in breadth.

As for Steve Ironside, people looked at him askance, for since he had ceased to frequent "Brady's," he had not only incurred the displeasure of that potentate himself, but his old companions regarded him with suspicion. To the latter his conduct savoured of a conversion, and the law of association being a strong thing, he was classed with those mentally irresponsible beings who sat on the stool of repentance for one month in the year, and worshipped at the shrine of the sweet Goddess of Pleasure for the odd eleven. But there was another and a more objectionable class still, consisting of those who had anathematized him in public when in the old days he had openly set at nought the cardinal virtues, but who now, because he had suddenly become a retiring and irreproachable member of society who would not favour the elect with details regarding his conversion in Meeting-

house, prayed for him publicly like the Pharisees of old. They expressed the hope that the repentant sinner, who had been brought to see the error of his wicked ways—through their special mediation with the Almighty—might be still further enlightened.

A change had indeed come over Steve, a change so startling that it sometimes surprised even himself, and made him laugh with something almost approaching cynical incredulity. Brady's, moreover, knew him no more: the place had lost its old charm for him; he wondered now how he could ever have gone there. But as for the reason of this mysteriously sudden change, it was strange that he should strive to banish it altogether from his own mind; he busied himself with other things to avoid thinking of it, though with what measure of success he alone and his Maker knew.

So far as Paul was concerned, there was no doubt he was honestly gratified by this apparent reformation. But he put it down to the efficacy of his own public prayer, and, therefore, in duty bound—not to speak of whatever brotherly affection might still have lingered in his heart—stretched out a not unwelcome hand to his brother, and gave him a

subordinate position in his employ. Steve was no ingrate, but the mysterious reformation referred to was doubtless the reason why he took the often needlessly dictatorial commands of his elder in such a seemingly subdued and quiescent spirit, listening to the well-meant but dogmatic advice, interspersed with hoary old saws, in a manner that a keen observer might have noticed was a condition of painful restraint.

But let no one misjudge Paul Ironside. He would have been more than human had not a spark of resentment quickened in his breast now and again towards that brother as he thought of the times—when his sense of kinship was more sensitive than in the latter days—when he had given him grave cause for uneasiness, and indirectly brought contempt on the name of Ironside. He showed he remembered such things in many ways, and who can blame him? The man, with all his lordly and self-assertive doings, had so much that was human and commonplace in him. He liked well enough to do good, but he liked to get credit from the world for doing it. Like most men who have a supreme belief in their own virtues, and a craving for recognition at the same time, in trying to secure

the latter he only succeeded in belittling himself; for he never lost an opportunity of letting everyone with whom he came in contact know how much his own flesh and blood wanted helping. He was a successful merchant, and a zealous Churchman, but a faulty Christian. He was a man of impulses and apparent contradictions. For instance, he would bully an employé as if he were a pickpocket, one minute, but turning round the next, present him with a five-dollar bill, telling him to go and take a holiday for the good of his health. The natural tendency of his mind was for good, and he was honest by nature, but the world had made him false to himself. He was one of those men who, strangely enough, will toil like heroes through adversity, but the weak points in whose characters are such that they cannot stand prosperity. They will not recognize such factors in their success as time, circumstance, or place—anything calculated to detract from their sense of self-satisfaction, and constitute themselves their own gods. Their hankering after position blinds them to the means they adopt to obtain it—means which amuse a critical and cynical world.

Success had indeed given Paul an inordinate

idea of his own importance, and made him a hard man to get on with.

In spite of his apparent regeneration, Steve never entered the Meeting-house again, nor was the young lady from Ottawa ever seen within its walls. The two had been driven together, hand in hand, as it were, out of the Eden of the United Christians; and, as if by a tacit understanding, they seemed quite content to remain under the same terrible ban. To one of them, at least, it partook of the nature of a subtle bond between them, a bond which he hardly dared to admit to himself, but which he did not regard with any particular disfavour.

Sometimes Steve, in his solitary walks at off hours, met the woman whom he looked upon as his social superior, and he noted, with his naturally quick perceptions, that the little pleased smile that lit up her face, whenever she happened to catch sight of him, was genuine. He even noticed that there was an air of interest and frankness in her intercourse with him which was altogether wanting when she addressed his brother Paul. He was not aware that the girl was studying him as a type. It was one which fascinated but perplexed her, for of

course she could only imperfectly guess at its process of evolution.

So far as Steve's outward appearance was concerned, he was now a very different looking man from the sorry, jaundiced, and indifferently-clad Ishmaelite, who, in the first chapter of this history, was discovered "suffering recovery." His was now a very respectable appearance indeed. Steve was one of the few men in Calumet who could look quite unconscious of the fact that he wore his best clothes.

To return to the Commissioner's daughter ; as the winter wore on the unique social gatherings of the inhabitants ceased to interest her ; she studied types no longer in over-heated parlours, and, instead, took to skating on the river by moonlight—by far the pleasantest time in these latitudes. Now, this happened to be one of Steve Ironside's principal distractions also, so it was only what might have been expected when on one of these occasions Miss Macdonald overtook him as he skated up very leisurely towards the Red Cliffs. He would have turned aside and let her pass, but she would not have it so ; for she did not think, like some of her august sisterhood, that hers was the privilege of

shaking a man's hand cordially one day, and freezing him with a stony stare of irrecognition the next. She greeted him in a pleased and kindly fashion, and they skated up the river together.

Now they had to thread their way on the wind-swept ice under the high, dark cliffs, where the brooding shadows lay black as jet ; and then, again, they sought the broad bosom of the river, where the long ribs of drifted snow lay glistening in the mellow moonlight, like ghostly milky ways or giant shafts of wan light stretching out and on into hazy indistinctness.

There was the potent solemn silence of that vast lone land all around them—a silence that seemed to rise up like a barrier between man and the world, and fill the breasts of short-lived mortals who wandered there with a vague yearning and long unutterable thoughts. There was nothing above them but the moon's white inscrutable face, and the gleaming stars in the awesome infinity of space, looking as if they knew the secrets of men but revealed them not. Before them was the wind-swept channel ; under them, and the ringing runners of their skates, lay the massive floor of ice of an opaque bluish-blackness, but holding here and there

imprisoned in its depths strangely-lurking iridescent flashes of light, suggestive of the flitting prismatic glories of the opal or the phosphorescent chasteness of the breaking wave: these were mysterious fairy-like lights with their weird ephemeral beauty. Beneath them again ran the deep and ever-flowing waters, which, springing from mountains whose heavenward-soaring peaks overlook a sleeping western ocean, and running through the heart of a vast continent, at length reach a storm-tossed, leaden-hued northern sea, whose waters lave these blessed isles of ours.

In the hushed but vibrating reticence of Nature there was that hint of silent worship which surrounds the Maker of All Things.

It may have been the subtle influence of these all-potent forces that made these two, so dissimilar in experiences, feel the insignificance of the social barriers with which man has hedged himself round for his own temporal well-being—which instinctively made them realize that they were very much alone in the world, and which all unconsciously drew them together with a sense of secret sympathy, influencing their mental outlook and revealing an affinity of soul. For, after all, let the philosopher, the man

of the world, and the woman of fashion, surround and guard themselves as they may with the sternest of truths, or the most sordid and selfish tenets of pleasure, these things shall be as naught when the little god draws his bow and sends his arrows home.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COURTSHIP OF PAUL IRONSIDE.

CONSIDERING these were the days of Prohibition in the Territories, and the laws in regard thereto were supposed to be rigidly enforced by that magnificent body of cavalry, the North-West Mounted Police, it was indeed a wonder where all the brandy came from that burned on the plum-puddings of the good citizens of Calumet at Christmas time. Nor did the liquor seem kept to pour over puddings only; in Brady's hotel, in the mysterious little saloons where only temperance drinks were supposed to be sold, in the back premises of the chemist, and even in private houses, there seemed to be unwonted signs of somewhat boisterous hilarity. Of course there were knowing ones who said that you had only to wink your left eye to Brady over the bar when you asked for ginger-ale, and he would understand ;

that as for the mysterious little saloons they were nothing more nor less than gambling and drinking dens, kept by those who had an interest in the smuggling outfits for running liquor into the country; that as for the rather alarming patronage the chemist seemed to enjoy at the hands of the male population, it was significant that when the customers came out of that little back shop they bore with them a suspicious odour of cloves or peppermint; and as for the unusually festive sounds that came on the breath of even—and perhaps, oftener in the small witching hours of the morning—from the habitations of the elect; why, there were permits in these houses signed by the Lieutenant Governor for two gallons of liquor, and Christmas only came once a year. Some of those permits seemed to last for an unconscionable time.

Upon the whole, it looked very much as if Prohibition was only a name, despite the fact that the Mounted Police were every now and again seizing consignments of whiskey that outwardly took the form of bottles of horse-medicine, and kegs of fire-water were found packed in barrels of innocent salt and sugar. There could be no doubt that the law

was rather conducive to secret drinking, and was not calculated to encourage the virtues of self-respect. When some men, following the general fashion at Christmas, speculated in a "permit," the very fact of not having touched liquor for the greater part of the year, seemed to render them utterly unable to exercise any self-restraint, and the result was pitiful to a degree. In all truth, the festive season in Calumet was much as it was in most other prohibition towns, a by no means tranquil and pleasant time for those who believed in spending it in a proper and rational fashion. It was a time of excesses and abuses in which it was no secret an uncommonly large percentage of the United Christian Brethren participated. There could be no doubt that the privacy of the saloons was the cause of much of the evil, for with the coming of properly licensed houses these hells were promptly shut up by those who contributed legitimately to the revenue.

It was therefore anticipating such a condition of things that about a fortnight before Christmas Mr. Macdonald took it into his head that an expedition, partaking of the nature of a shooting and picnic party, in the rugged pine-clad hills that lay some

thirty miles to the south, like islands in the ocean-like expanse of prairie land, would be a pleasant diversion and a good excuse to get out of it all. Moreover, the season was comparatively mild and pleasant, and in the North-West Territories—though the winter is generally cold, and the quick-silver sometimes falls very low indeed—the air is always dry and bracing, and the all-enlivening sun shines brightly down, converting fields of virgin snow into seas of burnished silver. To see a light fall of dry powdery snow being hurried along by a gentle breeze in the bright sunshine, scintillating and glittering like a shower of fine diamonds, and creating a gorgeous rainbow all its own, is one of Nature's loveliest sights.

No sooner had Mr. Macdonald decided on his trip than he began to make his plans accordingly. Nestling in a romantic situation among the hills there was a lovely lake, with great scarred, pine-clad crags hemming it in on two sides, and a large disused Mounted Police post with good general accommodation and stabling on the western side, from which the prairie rolled away in great wave-like buttes and coulees. These buildings were perfectly intact, with stoves and tables; so with a

few camp bedsteads they could be made very habitable indeed. The next thing was to choose his company. Of course his daughter Ruth would come, and she would bring her maid. A Mrs. Grainger, the wife of an officer of Mounted Police, whose entire troop had been suddenly called up north, to a reported outbreak in the neighbourhood of Prince Albert, had also promised to bear his daughter company, and so that part of the programme was complete. As for his own companions, he had not much choice, but perhaps he did not require much. He was one of those genial, broad-minded men who have the courage of their opinions, and whose opinions are formed more by what they see than by what they hear. He had been "through the mill" and roughed it in his youth, and being made of the right stuff, he had shaken himself free from the petty and mercenary prejudices that hedge in and mould the thoughts and manners of those who have only seen one side of the shield. Although he was of good old stock himself, he recognized that the truest nobility is sublimely indifferent to such details as wealth or birth, and therefore, when called upon, he judged all men by a manly standard. He feared God, honoured the

Queen, loved his own fireside, and could, metaphorically, call a spade a spade when the occasion called for it. He was, though not an adept, a keen sportsman, and his thoughts straightway turned to a congenial companion in the person of old Dr. Miles of Calumet, whose love for the free adventurous Western life had, years before, led him to forego a prosperous career in Eastern Canada, to strike the uncertain trail that led westward into that vast fascinating land of the red man, where one might lead a life that was free and untrammelled by convention as its boundless prairies. He had eventually settled down in Calumet, and several times since then had made trips east so as to freshen his ties with civilization. He was a genial companion, and knew more concerning the picturesque Indian legends and stirring tales of the prairie, than almost any other man in Calumet. He at once signified his willingness to accompany the Commissioner.

It was at this point Mr. Macdonald discovered, when he applied to the police authorities, that he had been anticipated in his wishes to secure the disused outpost as a comfortable camp by Paul Ironside. It seemed that the latter was in the

habit of taking advantage of the slack season every Christmas to enjoy his annual holiday in these hills, where he could combine much needed rest with a little hunting, to which he was partial in a mild and modest way. It was odd, and not a little annoying, that the prospective representative of Calumet in the Legislative Assembly should have so quietly, and only by a few days, taken measures that bid fair to upset his cherished plans. On receipt of the news he went in consternation to the Doctor.

"It's all my fault," exclaimed the latter, somewhat ruefully. "I knew Paul Ironside had got the loan of the Post on one or two occasions, but I understood he wasn't going to apply for it this winter. But why not go and call upon him in a casual sort of way, and find out whether or not he has made up a party? Perhaps if he was made aware of your intentions, and he had not asked any of his own very particular friends, there's no saying but that you might come to some arrangement."

The Commissioner looked dubious, and hesitated before he spoke.

"I hardly like to," he remarked at last. "Ironside

is a most worthy man, I admit, but he always gives me the impression of one who is acting a part and always patting himself on the back. The fact of his success seems always uppermost in his mind, and he gives you the idea that he considers the gaining of the almighty dollar man's chief end. He has always been very courteous and kind to me, but I've never seemed to find anything in common with him."

"Nonsense!" was the vigorous comment, "that's because you don't know the man. There's hardly anyone round here who does know him. All that artificiality of manner, and way he has of talking big, is only the result of his success—which he has earned and no mistake—it's not the real man, and some day he'll get it taken out of him, depend upon it—pride always goes before a fall. At heart he's really all right, and he's not by nature mean, as some people suppose. It's from a slight touch of vanity and mistaken notions of duty that he acts and poses as he does. He is at least perfectly sincere and honest in his convictions, and he deserves credit for that. Take my tip and go to him. And, by the way, if you could manage to get his brother Steve to go with us, you'd be doing

a sensible thing. He's by far and away the best hunter round these parts."

"Well, I like him better than his brother if it comes to that; he's certainly much more like a gentleman, despite the life he has led. But isn't he just a little—you see, one can't help hearing what those people say sometimes—"

The doctor used a very strong word indeed, and interrupted his friend.

"For goodness sake, Macdonald!" he exclaimed, "don't you go and defer to Mrs. Grundy, too! I always suspect a man or woman of some ulterior motive when they advocate a certain line of action, and adopt the lame excuse that they are afraid of Mrs. Grundy; because they know in their hearts that the world doesn't really always believe what she says, knowing her to be generally a liar. As for Steve Ironside, I'd sooner trust him than any man in Calumet. He may have kicked over the traces a bit when he was younger, owing to a superfluity of high spirits, but if you knew him as well as I do, you'd see him in a different light. You can take my word for it, he is fitter for the society of women than most men in Calumet."

"I'm glad to think it," was the reply. "I'll go and see his brother right away."

Mr. Macdonald found Paul Ironside in his little office alongside the store, and carefully approached the subject.

The successful man of the world at first seemed to have very little to say; he appeared to be studying his visitor, and waited patiently until the object of his visit was obvious; then, somewhat to the surprise of Mr. Macdonald, he briefly said:

"Well, it was my intention to get up a little party, but somehow I haven't exactly been able to carry my plans out. I haven't asked anyone to go with me yet; I shan't now, you can take the place instead and welcome to it."

He paused awkwardly, as if there was something he would like to have added, but could not find courage to say. But Mr. Macdonald was equal to the occasion, and straightway proposed that he should make one of the party. To this Paul readily agreed, and at once proclaimed his intention of sending a couple of men in advance to the Post to put it in good habitable condition, and to set up some iron bedsteads. There had been no shooting parties over the hills lately, and they

could make pretty sure of a fortnight's good sport. When asked if there was anyone whom he would like to ask to join the party, the merchant shook his head. It was only then that Mr. Macdonald remarked that Dr. Miles had expressed a hope that his brother Stephen would go with them if they went into the hills; his knowledge of hunting and of all phases of prairie life, not to speak of the pleasure of his society, would make him a valuable acquisition.

Paul seemed taken aback for the moment, looked keenly at his visitor, and a dry smile flitted across his face. Mr. Macdonald looked at him wonderingly, and asked, good-naturedly, if it had never occurred to him to give his own brother an opportunity of a change of scene at Christmas? To which Paul replied, somewhat sheepishly, that his brother had to work for a living, and that he could hardly lay claim to having earned a holiday just yet; he—Paul—was a self-made man, and didn't believe in blood-ties and in matters of sentiment. However, there was no doubting the fact that Steve was the very man for a trip of the kind, and, under the circumstances, he could spare him from his employ for a fortnight. Perhaps Mr. Macdonald would ask

him himself. But the Commissioner, not a little disgusted, would not hear of it, and insisted on the invitation passing through Paul's hands. He, however, said he would take an early opportunity of talking over certain arrangements with Steve, should he accept.

When the Commissioner had gone, the merchant sat looking into space with an odd smile on his face, and drumming on the desk with his fingers. Then he rang a little hand-bell. "Tell Stephen Ironside to come here," he said to the clerk who answered the call. In a few minutes Steve stood before him. His brother greeted him with an almost imperceptible nod, and regarded him critically. It was wonderful what a difference a few short months had made in the appearance of the Prodigal. He looked well nourished; he was well groomed; and the clôthes he wore, though of simple material, were well made, and sat on him with almost an appearance of smartness. There was an air of content and cheerfulness on his face that had been wanting several weeks before. He was, in all truth, a very different-looking man from the out-at-elbows, unkempt, and unhappy-looking individual who had turned up in Calumet in the

Fall at the close of a dreary afternoon. In his hand he held some papers and a pen.

"When will you be finished with that stock-taking?" asked Paul sharply.

"I've just finished," was the reply, "here are the papers, and I think you'll find the figures correct."

"You've been working overtime, then?" And Paul appeared somewhat mollified.

"Well, I reckon a new hand wants to do something of the sort till he gets to know the run of things a little better. The work's not hard."

"Well, I'm glad you're getting a little more sense. If you keep on as you're doing I'll give you another rise shortly. Going to Brady's of a night?"

The Prodigal's face flushed somewhat, but he managed to say quietly enough:

"Look here, Paul, you know well enough I'm not; if I did there's lots of jokers would be ready enough to tell you. At the same time, I'm not fancying myself a saint or claiming credit for it. I don't go, simply because I've found that that game's not worth the candle, and I can be happier elsewhere; if I wasn't, I daresay I'd go back to Brady's, so there! Besides, as I daresay you've

heard, old Hargrave, the freighter, who died about a fortnight ago, left me his house which is rather a good one, as you know, and just outside the town, and I'm fixing it up and going to live there."

"Well, I'm glad you're doing some good at last. Why don't you come to Meeting-house?"

Steve shifted from one foot to another, and eyed his brother curiously. There was not another man in Calumet would have dared take him to task like this; but he knew he had to a certain extent forfeited his right to independence of speech, so he answered Paul's somewhat curt and peremptory question in a manner which, if to the point, was subdued and respectful enough.

"Look here, Paul, you mean well enough, I know, but it strikes me that different people want different kinds of religion. It's something, to my way of thinking, that every man who wants to be sincere must work out for himself; in my case it wants a lot of working out—mere make-belief in Meeting-house won't do for me—it wants more than that. To me it seems that 'the new birth,' as you call it, is a gradual growth; something that is influenced by every thought we think and thing we

do. I know that I have my hands full before I can bring about that change in myself; but I may tell you that I'm trying hard, and perhaps it will come in time, and when it does come, it will come to stay. You remember our poor old dad; I don't think you ever heard him speak once in Meeting-house, and he didn't go too often there as you well know, but I think you'll admit that there's not a man in Calumet could hold the candle to him from the point of practical Christianity. If I went wrong it was no fault of his; and if there's one thing calculated to give me help now, it's the thought of the example he set me. Is there anything more you want to see me about, Paul?"

The successful man was obviously taken aback; he had not been accustomed to quite so much plain speaking from his brother of late. But the man was no fool, and doubtless seeing spiritual progress in the unwonted speech of the Prodigal, he wisely forebore to comment upon it, so changed the subject.

"What I really wanted to see you about is something of a different nature," he explained, modifying that curt, business-like-way he had of speaking. "I've just had Mr. Macdonald here, and we've

arranged a little shooting party—a sort of picnic affair—to the Hills. Old Miles had been telling him what a hunter you were, and they were wondering if you'd care to make one of their party. We'd be away for a fortnight, and make the old Police post, near the old Fort Walsh and Macleod trail, our headquarters. Will you come? There'll be nothing doing for the next two or three weeks here, and I can spare you. As for me, I've been working like a horse for some years now, and think I'm entitled to take things a little easier. You could take us to that coulee where you killed the two bears all by yourself some years ago. And look here, whatever you want for the trip you can get out of the store and chalk it up to me."

Surprise and something very like real emotion showed on the Prodigal's face for an instant, but like his brother, he was not given to betraying his feelings; still, with a burst of genuine enthusiasm, he said:

"Paul, you're a brick! There's nothing I'd like better. I can't tell you how I've been longing just for a touch of the old life again; my fingers have been actually itching to feel the pull of the trigger.

I'll come with pleasure, and thank you for the chance. I'll do anything you like on the trip—drive a waggon, look after the horses, do the cooking—”

“Give us a rest, man; that would be all right enough if you were with a party of other fellows, but you must recollect who you are going with. As my brother, of course, with justice to myself, I can't let you make a regular camp-hand of yourself. You do your best so far as the hunting is concerned—that will be your province. And, I say, you know, you've got to watch your P's and Q's on the trip, and recollect you're with gentlemen.” The Prodigal was about to utter a very pronounced ejaculation, but his memory harked back, and self-condemned, he bit his lip instead, and remained silent—“What's more, there will be ladies with the party: Miss Macdonald and Mrs. Grainger are going.”

But Steve betrayed no elation over the fact; indeed, he seemed rather surprised, and his countenance clouded over for the moment. The prospect of the ladies' society seemed in no way to please him.

Paul looked at him thoughtfully, and with

something that resembled the ghost of a smile upon his face, remarked :

"You don't seem to cotton to the idea of the women going with us, Steve; but then, you never did seem to run after the petticoats much. I understood that you had been rather friendly with Miss Macdonald of late. She's certainly a girl without anything stuck up or narrow in her composition, or she wouldn't—well, you'll excuse me, Steve, but you'll know I'm only speaking the truth—be seen quite so much with you for instance."—Steve's face flushed, his fingers twitched nervously and he moved his feet about uneasily—his brother had never asked him to sit down—but still, by some powerful effort of will, he managed to hold himself in check.—"Of course, when a woman's sure of her position she can do things with impunity that another woman can't. So far as decent stock goes, you come of as good a family as she does; but you've got the name of being rather a wild, reckless sort of chap, and naturally enough it sticks to you."

The Prodigal tried to hide the sense of mortification and irritation that pressed him hard just then, and forced himself to change the subject.

"By the way, Paul, hadn't you better let me call up at your place and have a look at your guns and rifles? I'm not quite sure that that man you've got quite understands them, and I know you haven't time to look after such things yourself. I can do it in my spare time."

"All right, and I'll pay you for it—"

"O, damn it!" cried the Prodigal, surprised out of his determination to keep cool at any price, "this is too steep, Paul; you talk about a man behaving like a gentleman and then you go and insult a fellow by rating a little service that would be a positive pleasure to him to do at a money value! Can't you give a man credit for a single good intention or a motive that is not mercenary? Because a man's made a mistake and owns to having been a fool, is he to be denied all encouragement when he strives honestly to step out in the right direction again? You know I'm a dependent, and you may think I've a good deal of what you call my 'cursed pride' left, but don't forget that I've still got my feelings as a man, and if you really want to see me try to straighten things out, for goodness sake discriminate if you can, and don't put things that way. Do you think

I'm not grateful for what you've done? If you think so you make a big mistake; only, it's not a thing easy to speak about—let me show I'm thankful in my own way. Now, don't get riled, you did put up my back just now, I'll admit, but you're the older of the two, and supposed to set me an example."

Steve's sudden ebullition of feeling seemed to have died away as quickly as it had been called into existence, and there was something like a whimsical smile on his face as he concluded his speech. It seemed to mollify Paul.

"Keep your shirt on, you hot-headed beggar!" exclaimed the latter, with something more nearly approaching a friendly smile than he had for years vouchsafed the scrapegrace of the family. "I didn't mean to insult you. I only thought I'd put an extra five-dollar bill in your way; I know you're not too flush."

"And I know you're not mean; only, as I said before, discriminate. It's not the gift but the way of giving. I'll come up to your place, and see you're fixed up properly. Anything more I can do just at present?"

Paul thrust his hands deep into his trouser

pockets, lay back in his chair, and seemed to find something of interest in connection with the lamp that hung from the ceiling. What he had to say did not seem to particularly interest him.

"By the way, what sort of girl is Miss Macdonald?" he asked. "You've skated with her, I know, while I've hardly spoken a dozen words to her. She seems to me an independent sort of creature and goes her own way. But those good-looking women generally do. I didn't think anything about her till only the other day, and—"

"I'm listening," said Steve, encouragingly, and with a ghost of a smile, as he noted something like the dawn of embarrassment in his brother's manner.

"I happened to meet her walking out along the trail as I was sleighing to the ranche. She was evidently going to Grainger's place, so I stopped and asked her if she wouldn't jump in and take a ride. She hesitated, and—"

So did Paul, but the Prodigal helped him again with a cheerful—"of course, quite right, and she jumped in?"

"Well, no; that's just what she didn't, at least, at first. She said it was hardly worth while; that

she had come out purposely to have a walk, and she was only going to Grainger's."

"Which no doubt was true. You surely didn't infer by that that she had really any objection to driving with you?"

"I did think it odd at the time—" He stopped short, and looked as if he were sorry he had gone so far. Steve saw his unwonted discomposure, and actually felt sorry for him, although a by no means pleasant thought suggested itself to him then.

"But you didn't let a trifling thing like that worry you, I hope?" he remarked, with an odd curiosity to know what did happen.

"Worry me? no fear!" Paul hastened to say, with a show of his old self-assertiveness. "I wasn't going to let any woman think I cared a cent about any such little airs as that. Why, there's not a girl in Calumet, though I say it, wouldn't be glad enough—"

"For goodness sake, Paul, don't judge all girls by those in Calumet—money can't always do everything."

"It can with most women, and I think I should know, Steve. What can you—?"

"Perhaps you're right, and I'm no judge; it may

influence their ultimate actions, but as long as human nature is human nature—and that will be until the end of time—it can't buy their love. I daresay, as you suggest, that some women will sell themselves for gold and position or a home, although they know they have no love to give in return ; but that means a woman's hell afterwards—a loveless life. I once knew a woman who married a man out of pity for him, and because, as she said, she admired his character ; but she ate her heart out afterwards, for she discovered that she could love—but not the man she was married to. Don't you make any such mistake, Paul, or you may find yet that money isn't everything. But tell us, old chap, what happened next?"

In his concern to find out, and if possible remove the cause of his brother's evident trouble, Steve proved that with him at least "blood was thicker than water," in that he had used the old once familiar term of address that had been discarded for so many long years. But Paul remained silent and bit his lips, the incident referred to perplexed and was more serious in his eyes than he admitted.

"You needn't mind me, Paul. I might be able to throw some light on the matter," again said

Steve quietly. "So far as that sort of thing is concerned, I've been there in my time, too. What did you do or say when she said she had come out purposely for a walk, and it was hardly worth while taking a ride?"

"O, nothing much. I thought she was just a trifle saucy, so I said I was sorry I spoke, and lifting my hat, coldly but politely, prepared to drive off"—the Prodigal smiled despite himself at this point—"However, she had been watching my face, and no doubt seeing that she had mistaken her man, called on me to stop and jumped in beside me. She was jolly good company, too; and I had hardly noticed before that she was something more than merely good-looking. Now, what do you make of that?"

"Well, I can't say I make a great deal, only that she meant what she said in the first instance, and being a real good-hearted girl without any nonsense about her, changed her mind about accepting your offer of a drive on seeing you were huffy about her refusal, and as she didn't want to vex you. Is that all?"

"Not quite; she's about the first woman I've met whom I haven't been exactly able to understand.

When we got to Grainger's I naturally supposed she wanted to get out, but to my surprise she asked instead where I was going, and when I told her just to speak for a second or two to Sanderson at the ranche a few miles farther on, she said she reckoned she wasn't extra particular about calling in at Grainger's that day, so if I didn't mind she'd go on with me. As she was very good company, sensible, and lively in a way that those other girls in Calumet aren't, I told her I was right down pleased to have her, and we drove on. I don't think I ever enjoyed a drive with any woman as much as I did with her; she seemed to take such an interest in Calumet, in my views upon church matters and things in general"—the Prodigal smiled grimly, and hated himself for what he knew was a mean action the next moment—"When we got back, I asked her when I'd call for her again—and here's where her contrariness comes in—she merely said she was ever so much obliged to me for the drive, but couldn't exactly fix a date, but she'd let me know. I've seen her on the sidewalk since then, but she has merely bowed to me—pleasantly enough, I must confess—and passed on."

"Well, I don't exactly see what you've got to complain about. If she had jumped at your offer, as you suggest most other girls would have done, do you think she would have interested you more than she seems to do now?"

"No, I don't think she would. It's a queer thing; I wouldn't wonder if it's this very contrariness in some women that makes men interested in them."

"Have you only found that out now? I daresay, however, you've had no time to think much about such things. That's how so many men like you lose themselves, Paul. Apart from their religion, they think there is only one thing worth thinking about, and that's money. They find out their mistake when they've taken some irrevocable step, and they also find that money can't mend matters. By the way, didn't you say that Sanderson had got back to the Ranche?"

Paul shot a quick surprised glance at his brother, and with a pitiful attempt to pass the matter off with a laugh, replied:

"I daresay I did make that excuse to her, but all's fair in love or war, my boy. No, of course as you know, Sanderson's gone to Battleford."

"Oh, I see, that's how you came back without

looking at those horses Wilmett had fetched to the ranche for you to see. Miss Macdonald *must* have interested you. I think you made a mistake in telling her you only wanted to speak to Sanderson when he wasn't there; you don't give women credit for knowing most things. You'll excuse me, I'm sure, Paul, but that's the worst about you church folk, you think that as long as you hold the Bible in your right hand, you can do what you like with your left; you preach charity to your neighbour on Sunday, and you try to get ahead of him by hook or by crook on Monday. But it's not for a chap like me to preach to you; the beam in my eye's much bigger than the mote in yours. Between ourselves, have you been thinking seriously about Miss Macdonald?"

The Prodigal watched his brother's face anxiously as he asked the question, and a phase of the situation dawned upon him that moved him with an apprehension that was little short of a revelation. He knew that he had in a great measure wasted his life, and neglected the things of the world, so that for him to think about any woman seriously, especially one like the woman now in question, was worse than folly—he was reaping the whirlwind with

a vengeance. He might view his brother in whatever light he chose, but one thing was certain, he had deserved success, and his worldly position was such that it gave him a right to aspire to the hand of any woman in the province whom he looked favourably upon. He owed it to Paul not to stand in his way but to aid him. It was in a sense part of his punishment, and he knew he deserved it.

Paul hesitated before he spoke, and then looking Steve squarely enough in the eyes, said:

"Since you put it that way, I have been thinking about her. It's a mighty queer thing, and I can hardly account for it, for I've seen so little of her."

"I don't think that matters," interrupted Steve moodily, and looking into space; "love is something that is a law to itself; it's something that you can't account for or control; it's the most powerful and wonderful thing in the world, and if you try to run against it you run against God Himself."

It was significant that a man who had tasted of the lees of life as Calumet's Prodigal had done, should bear such testimony to such a power. For a minute he remained wrapped in thought, and then as if by an effort, rousing himself, continued:

"Well, your secret's safe with me, you can rest assured about that. She is a good woman, and you'll likely see a good deal of her on this trip. But let a fool give you one word of advice. When you woo a woman of the right sort, never once think of your money or your position: approach her on your own merits as a man—that's what has got to win. If she doesn't take to you, don't let your heart suffer more than you can help, for you can make sure you were never intended for each other. I'm sick of skating these days; I'm taking to reading instead, but I'll look in at your place this evening and see to those guns. So long, Paul!"

CHAPTER VII.

A SHOOTING PARTY.

THERE were rumours that the fanatic Louis Riel was making mischief in the land, and that half-breeds and Indians were only awaiting their opportunity to rise: But was not the North-West Mounted Police, one of the finest bodies of cavalry in the British Empire, on the spot to protect the lieges? Was not the rank and file of this red-coated constabulary composed of men—some of them with blue blood in their veins—of whom it had been truly said that not one of them was ever known to turn his back upon an enemy? And as for the officers, the sun set on none who were abler men. All this talk about an outbreak was surely the idle imaginings of the timorous ones. At least, there could be no immediate danger in the neighbourhood of Calumet; there was no reason why the shooting

party should not start out. If Mr. Macdonald or Paul Ironside were wanted, it was known where they could be found; a thirty-mile sleigh-ride on a well-defined trail was not an insurmountable obstacle.

To those in Calumet who saw the party start, it was quite an imposing spectacle. There were two large low waggon on runners filled with provisions and camping paraphernalia, and three sleighs. There were Mr. Macdonald and his daughter, Mrs. Grainger, Dr. Miles, Paul Ironside, Steve, a couple of half-breeds, and a French Canadian, who was to act as cook to the party.

Preparations had been made for a ten days' sojourn during the Christmas holidays at the old Police post at Elk Water Lake, among the wild, wooded hills. There was good hunting all around, and they could, if they chose, make many interesting excursions into the unsettled, picturesque, outlying country from that point. It was a land that only a few years before had been a veritable Tom Tiddler's ground of romance. It contained, in a beautiful wooded valley, the ruins of one of the oldest settlements in that vast country, which had been an *Ultima Thule* of civilization before the one,

seemingly interminable, trail across a mighty continent was diverted some thirty miles to the north, leaving it utterly tenantless. It had been a stronghold and great camping ground of the Indians; it had been the scene of innumerable stirring, bloody battles between Bloods, Siouxs, Piegons, Assiniboines and Crees; in its deep, inaccessible, pine-shrouded defiles, murderers and smugglers had sought shelter; it was simply instinct with the glamour of an adventurous and picturesque past. Its history was closely associated with some of the most lurid scenes in the history of the red man; it was a typical spot in the land of the blood-red sunsets; and even now, from time to time, things happened among these hills that showed the spirit of the wild west still lived and lingered there.

Away went the party along the trail in the bright sunshine, to the merry jangling of sleigh bells. The pale blue sky above was as spotless as that far-stretching shroud of virgin snow that lay ahead and around them. The morning being cold and clear, and the air dry, to breathe it was to feel one lived. It was as exhilarating as a draught of good champagne, but only it had this advantage, there was

no reaction. The great sweep in the form of a horse-shoe that the high, precipitous, clay cliffs of the Saskatchewan took, showed away to the north like a mighty chocolate-coloured bow suspended in a filmy world of white and blue which glistened and gleamed. Very snug seemed Calumet as one looked back at it, half hidden behind its great snow-wreaths, but betraying its presence by dingy chimney-pots, and the thin columns of smoke they sent into the still air. A few hundred yards and they were out of the valley of the Saskatchewan, and lo! another world met their gaze. They were on an illimitable snow-bound steppe, which rolled away as far as the eye could reach, in a series of wave-like heights and hollows. It was a heaving, milk-white sea, glistening in the bright sunshine. There was not a stick or a stone to break the breadth and realistic effect of the illusion. It filled one with an overpowering sense of the immensity and the loneliness of that vast prairie-land; and had it not been for the subdued hiss of the runners over the crisp snow, resembling the steady seething of water past a ship's side, and the jangling of the bells, one would have felt that the silence of this land was something appalling—a veritable presence that weighed on the soul like

a nightmare, till the victim was fain to cry out to free himself from the spell.

To the east, the horizon's farthest rim seemed to blend with the sky-line in a hazy indistinctness ; but away to the south there rose up from that ocean-like surface, showing blackly against the pale blue, a great irregular mass of land that looked for all the world like an island in that ghastly waste, and figuratively speaking it was an island, for it was the everlasting pine-crested hills, with the billowy prairie rolling up to, and breaking at their base. They were still some twenty miles off, but it was hard to believe it. They stood out so boldly ; they were black as jet in that world of white and blue. Once during the forenoon they saw a remarkable sight, that of a mock sun in the heavens, and a wonderful series of rings, great bands of light that intersected one another with geometrical precision and kaleidoscopic effect. At another time, when a gentle breath of wind sprung up, the air seemed full of the finest diamond-like crystals that scintillated in the bright sunshine ; and, at times, the end of a rainbow seemed to spring into life from that lawn-like mist, and travelled with them, gorgeous with prismatic colouring.

Onward sped the party, now holding their breath as they shot down into some deep coulee with its frozen creek at the bottom, half buried underneath a wealth of overhanging wolf-willow and wild rose-bushes; perhaps disturbing a covey of prairie chickens engaged in a foraging expedition in that favoured spot; and then toiling slowly up the opposite hillside, the men generally getting out and walking up. As there was no place where they might break the journey and give the horses a rest, they kept right on, and early in the afternoon the precipitous reddish-brown headland of the Head of the Mountain towered high above them, covered and crowned with its magnificent display of giant pines. After the sameness of the prairie, it was a soul-refreshing sight—something very grand and impressive. They had now to pick their way carefully over the unbeaten trail which wound round and among little hills, always, however, seeming to increase in size. Then at last, when they had passed round the flank of one that boasted of almost precipitous sides, lo! they came right out on to the shores of Elk Water Lake, which seemed to run right into the heart of the great dark mountain. On two sides it was flanked

by pine-clad, rocky spurs, which shot up from the very water's edge ; but that water now had a covering of ice nearly three feet thick, and a carpet of snow on its surface. And there, in a cosy nook surrounded by giant trees, was the old Police post, a motley collection of large, roomy log huts, with stables and corral among the trees. When it was deserted by the Police some enterprising Scotchman, who had made a contract with the Force to supply it with meat in the neighbourhood of Calumet, had attempted to transform it into the headquarters of a ranche, but it was too convenient for the bears, which are connoisseurs in live stock generally, and was again deserted. Right cheerful and snug it looked now with the smoke issuing from the chimneys. Then there was a busy half-hour unloading and putting things straight.

When Ruth Macdonald and her friend saw the interior of the hut that had been set apart for them, they simply stared in astonishment. They had imagined, and quite expected, that they would have to rough it in such a place, but they were quite unprepared for the degree of comfort which Paul Ironside had got ready for them, when with the casually expressed intention of "fixing things

up a bit," he had sent on a couple of men and a waggon a few days ahead. There was a table, iron bedsteads, a carpet on the floor, and even a large looking-glass on the walls; in short, there was everything requisite to furnish an ordinary sleeping room. All the principal rooms had been re-lined with calico, which brightened them up wonderfully; the stoves were cleaned and in good going order; there were pegs on the walls for hanging things, and cupboards for stowing them away; a large pile of firewood at each doorway; indeed, no detail was wanting for the comfort and equipment of a hunting party in such a place. The room in which they were to have their meals was long and low, in the old days it had been used for a troopers' mess-room; a narrow covered way connected it with the kitchen. The whole party had been loud in their expressions of surprise and delight over the thorough and even luxurious manner in which Paul Ironside had completed the arrangements. Mr. Macdonald had found him in the stable, superintending the arrangements with regard to the welfare of the horses.

"I say, Ironside," he exclaimed, taking him aside, "I had to come to you before I went into lunch

to thank you for the way in which you have done things. Everything is simply perfect—ten thousand times better than I could have done it myself. And for a bachelor to have thought about the ladies in the way you have, is something that does you infinite credit. My daughter and Mrs. Grainger could hardly believe their eyes when they saw their room; but Miss Macdonald will thank you herself. Of course, you've been at some considerable expense, and as this is a joint affair, I merely want to let you know that you're not to go and forget to debit me with my full share of the damage. It is money well spent."

Paul's round and usually stolid face lit up with pleasure on being thus complimented. He had in reality spared neither pains nor money in making the arrangements as complete as they could possibly be made, therefore it was satisfactory to have his efforts appreciated.

"Don't mention it, sir," he replied. "To hear you speak like that, and to hear that Miss Macdonald is pleased, is reward enough for me. As for the expense, I hope you'll understand that is my affair; it isn't as if I couldn't afford to do it."

"Well, we'll discuss that another time. But I

can see my daughter coming. I fancy she wants to thank you for having been so thoughtful. She expected to have to rough it. Go and meet her. I am going to look at my guns."

"Thank you," stammered Paul, with a significance in his brief speech that somewhat mystified the Commissioner. "And believe me, I'd have done much more to please Miss Macdonald—and you."

Mr. Macdonald walked off to the men's quarters, and Paul Ironside turned to find Miss Macdonald coming towards him. He had hardly spoken to her since their eventful ride, and that had only been in the presence of a third party, and concerned such prosaic details as provisions and napery. He had then told her jokingly that she would have to rough it. Accustomed to camping out as she was, and doing most things for herself—which to their honour and credit, most Canadian girls can do, and do well—she had looked forward with not a little apprehension to the probable condition of the dis-used huts, picturing all sorts of wild and inconvenient creatures, such as snakes, centipedes, and skunks, in happy and undisturbed possession of the same. For a busy man like Paul Ironside to have gone to so much expense, and to have given himself

what must have unquestionably been so much thought and care, merely to add to her comfort, was indeed a compliment. Her warm, impulsive nature was deeply touched, by his kindness. He had somehow seemed to her the very last man who would have thought of such things. It was only another instance of how little really one was able to judge of a man's true character by appearances. True, she had caught him tripping, in that, when she had driven to the ranche with him, he had told her what was quite an unnecessary little story when he said he was merely going out there to say something to Sanderson, knowing full well that the man in question was not in the district at the time. Steve had not been so far out when he had said that women knew more about what was going on than they deemed it expedient to let men imagine they did, or that men gave them credit for knowing. But, doubtless, she had magnified the incident, and after all there was nothing in it. In this, indeed, she was right, for to do Paul justice, in business matters he was never known to say what was not true for the sake of gain. She herself, despising anything that savoured of untruthfulness, had resented the hint of it, and perhaps it had led her to treat him

with scantier courtesy than he had merited. While she had actually been avoiding and distrusting him, he had all the while been employing his valuable services and thinking of how he could contribute to her comfort—she whose part in the world was so small and unimportant. To do anyone an injustice was a mean crime; to be ungrateful was hardly less contemptible. She had, doubtless, been unintentionally guilty on the first charge; she would endeavour to make amends by showing her gratitude. There was not the slightest trace of embarrassment or diffidence in her manner as she stopped in front of him. It being comparatively mild in that sheltered spot, she had taken off her heavy furs, and even her beaver cap, and now stood before him in her simple, serviceable, but well-made travelling dress. The sunlight gleamed and lingered in the mazes of her heavy, brown hair. She seldom did things by halves, and now that she felt she owed this man gratitude, she was not going to fall short in giving expression to it through mistaken ideas of modesty. Her face glowed with animation as she spoke.

“Mr. Ironside,” she said, smiling up at him, “I couldn’t go into lunch until I had found and thanked

you for what you've done for us women. I can't find words to thank you sufficiently, everything is so beautiful and perfect. How you came to think of all those things is really wonderful. It is something we certainly did not expect. I wish we could make you realize how grateful we are."

He looked down upon her fair young face, whose beauty, perhaps, lost nothing by its suggestion of womanly strength, and noted the added charms of animation and sincerity. Moreover, there was that about her, something which, when he afterwards tried to define it, he could only vaguely attribute to the influences of gentle birth and the reflex of a cultured mind—something of a rarer and finer nature than any he had hitherto met—and he was conscious of a sense of elation, higher than any he had yet experienced. It was of a nature calculated to raise and refine the man, but still his environment had been too strong for him, and in replying he expressed himself badly. Somewhat self-consciously he remarked:

"Well, that's all right, I'm glad you're pleased. It's no more than you deserve, and I wanted to show you I could do things right up to the mark

when I wanted to;”—he took sudden fright as he saw the look of apprehension in her eyes—“but of course my main idea was to please you. I’d like to please, and I’d like you to think well of me. If there’s anything more I can do for you, just give it a name and I’ll have it done at once, if it means sending into Calumet. Hang trouble and expense, I say!”

She was conscious of a sense of disappointment, but still she knew the danger she was exposed to by her critical and hyper-sensitive nature, and tried to lose sight of much that his speech implied.

“Perhaps I wasn’t thinking as much about the expense as your thoughtfulness,” she rejoined laughingly. “I’m afraid some of us wouldn’t get much credit for goodness if we were judged by the length of our purses. I should be very sorry to rate what you’ve done at such a value.”

“Would you?” he asked somewhat abruptly, and with what seemed to her quite unnecessary earnestness. “I’m glad you put it in that way, now I come to think of it; for, perhaps, after all, it’s fairer to a man to judge him by what he feels in his heart, and would do if he could, than by what he can pay out without missing. I’m afraid I don’t

always express myself properly; you see, I'm always accustomed to look at things from a money point of view. Now, I don't want *you* to judge me by what I could do for you by a matter of dollars and cents."

"It is well to be you to have them," she remarked laughingly, ignoring the note of meaning in his words and manner, "but I'll try to think better of you than that. Is it not a lovely place? Who would have thought of meeting with such a wild and romantic spot in the centre of this great prairie-land? I've been simply dying for months to catch sight of something higher than the banks of the Saskatchewan. But there is the bell for lunch, or dinner, or whatever it is. Let us go in. I'm simply ravenous."

"If you think it sounds better, call it lunch," remarked Paul sententiously, as they walked towards the mess-room, "but in this part of the world we call it dinner; and the fun of the thing is, that what you call dinner we call supper, which is practically the same as the mid-day meal, and with this in common with all our meals, that we always drink tea. Don't you like tea?"

"Yes," she laughed, "but it's a barbarous custom

to drink it to every meal. I've got more respect for my complexion than do that."

"Here we are," observed Paul. "You'll not mind me sitting next you at table, Miss Macdonald, will you?"

"Of course not. Why should I?"—she looked at him amusedly, with a suspicion of colour in her cheeks—"it's six of one, half-dozen the other where we sit, I fancy."

"Thank you," he observed humbly, "but I'm not quite so sure about that."

She regarded him smilingly, but with a puzzled expression in her eyes. Though she recognized that the man wanted to make himself agreeable to her, she wondered what it was in his manner that jarred on her so unpleasantly, and conveyed a mysterious sense of impending trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WAS A FOOL TO SAY SO."

THEY were having a glorious time at Elk Water Lake. They had bagged antelope, black-tail deer, prairie-chickens, and jack-rabbits, and had cut a great hole in the ice on the lake, over which they erected a tent, and caught some excellent fish. One might have expected this to have been rather cold work, but they put a little camp stove in the tent, and, as fuel was plentiful and cost nothing, it was rather a comfortable species of sport than otherwise. They had made excursions down the Medicine-Lodge to Big-Plume Creek and to War-Lodge Coulee. The weather was perfect, if anything perhaps just a trifle too mild—as weather went in that part of the world—for the time of the year. While the sun shone they hardly ever had a dull minute, and in the evening after supper, when they gathered round the great open fireplace, which Miss Macdonald would

insist on restoring to its original use in preference to the black cheerless-looking stove, it was perhaps the pleasantest part of the whole day; for then they killed their big game over again, and Dr. Miles, whose wonderful fund of information pertaining to the romantic side of the Great Lone Land seemed inexhaustible, would tell some of his most picturesque and entrancing tales, until his listeners held their breaths, and they saw as in a vision the prairies covered with enormous herds of buffalo that seemed to blacken the plains for miles and miles; yelling hordes of mounted Indians, brilliant in war-paint and feathers, circling furiously round the little ring of waggons that composed the settler's laager, and they almost fancied they heard the blood-curdling whoops, and the rattling din of the musketry.

But, perhaps, there was one there who, though younger in years, had seen actually more of the wild life than the Doctor. That was Steve, but, contrary to his wont, he seemed rather diffident in speaking of his experiences. When he was induced, however, to tell a story, he very soon warmed to his work, and proved that not only was he a master in telling, but he also possessed the eye of the poet and the

painter, for with a few broad, bold touches, he could make his subject stand out as on a canvas, fresh and picturesque. It was wonderful how, considering the grim sights he had seen, and the hardening process naturally attendant thereto, he had preserved his faith in the inherent goodness of humanity, and his love for all that was best and beautiful. When he spoke of himself at all, one would have imagined that he was speaking of someone whose actions he had reason to deprecate. More than once had Dr. Miles to interrupt him and put a different complexion on his narrative. As for Miss Macdonald, she merely sat and listened, and it would have been difficult to judge by anything she said what she thought of his tales from the life, which were a hundred times more entrancing than romance.

As for Paul Ironside, there could be little doubt but that the Commissioner's daughter was making a deep impression upon him. It took various forms. Apart from the amount of attention and deference he paid her, he had become altogether quieter and less self-assertive in his manner. He had always been very properly particular as to his personal appearance, but now he had become almost fastidious, even with such limited means of adornment

as were at his disposal. He did not seem to take the interest in the sport that might have been expected ; it had indeed become to him only a secondary consideration. He, the man who the greater part of his life had prided himself upon being superior to what he considered the ordinary weaknesses of humanity, had now succumbed to what in his eyes was the most absurd weakness of all—that which men called love. He had called it a weakness, but it had proved too strong for him ; just as it has proved too strong for most of us from all time ; for where love is not master, it is not love, or has ceased to be. But still the habit and the manner of the man had become second nature with him, and outwardly at least he was little changed. He still had that hint of conscious superiority, and tendency to dogmatise, but seeing he was now in contact with men of education and culture, who knew more about things in general than himself, he wisely accepted the inevitable and climbed down with tolerable grace. A few months before, impatient of contradiction, and with an exaggerated idea of his own importance, he would have adopted the rôle of Sir Oracle, and on any one expressing a difference of opinion would have lost his temper

and head at the same time, and shown in a very bad light indeed. He had worked hard, and had therefore spent but little time in reading, so no one could wonder if he was not particularly well versed in topics outside his sphere, and held distinctly crude and material opinions.

Steve, again, whenever the opportunity offered, had been a great reader, with that most important adjunct, a retentive memory, and so like those who have the true thirst for knowledge in them, he realized how much he had to learn, and was always modest. He had, however, the wild streak in his blood, and had failed where Paul succeeded.

It was rarely that Paul ever failed when once he had made up his mind to accomplish anything. He had powers of concentration, energy, and tenacity of purpose. Moreover, he could bide his time if need be. He knew that so far as worldly position went he had raised himself far above any other man in that part of the country, and being socially ambitious, he recognized that he must marry well if he would succeed in the life he had mapped out for himself. Hitherto he had recognized that there was no woman in Calumet who, by becoming his wife, would add to his prestige; and apart from

that, there was none whom he particularly cared for.

But now all that was changed. Miss Macdonald was one who possessed all the necessary qualifications to add lustre to any social position which he might aspire to when he entered Parliament, and went to live in Ottawa; and not only that, what he had seen of her had begun to bear the truth home upon him that she was requisite to his happiness. He had seen little of her, and their intercourse had been of the most commonplace description, but still, such was the belief of the man in himself, and his circumscribed knowledge of women, that the possible failure of his plans hardly suggested itself to him. Like most men of his stamp, failure hardly entered into his calculations. He went about his courtship on the most stereotyped lines.

As for Miss Macdonald, she did not at first suspect his intentions. She recognized that with him she had hardly two ideas in common. Because she never once dreamt of being on any other than the most ordinary terms of acquaintanceship with him, she was from the first frank, treating him as her father's friend. There was a strong vein of romance

in her temperament, and he, to her, seemed the very embodiment of the prosaic. She fully realized his many good qualities, but then they were hardly the sort that appealed to the romantic feminine mind. That two brothers should be so utterly dissimilar was to her an anomaly, and, being a student of human nature, the case interested her. She found no little amusement in observing the hard, matter-of-fact, pounds-shillings-and-pence way of looking at things of the one brother, as opposed to the easy-going, dreamy, and whimsically speculative temperament of the other. Paul, when he did not amuse her by his eminently practical way of looking at things, did not appeal to her otherwise; while Steve always interested and stimulated her imagination by the picturesque aspect in which he seemed to see things.

For the first few days at the Post she had scarcely noticed that Paul had somehow been a good deal associated with her movements. If she wanted to go out for a drive, he it was who naturally seemed to consider it his place to go with her; and when she intimated her intention at lunch of spending some time in the afternoon in fishing, she found that he had not gone out with the other men shooting,

but was waiting patiently for her with lines and hooks when, dressed in her furs, she prepared to start out. For the first few days she merely attributed this to the good nature of the man and to accident, for her father and Dr. Miles evidently did not care to go anywhere without taking Steve with them, and thus she saw but little of the latter save in the evening. She was no ingrate, and tried to make Paul feel that she appreciated his efforts to please, but when after a few days she discovered that he, like many more of her acquaintances, was limited in his mental vision and perceptions, and repeated himself, he began to pall upon her. He had furthermore a rather irritating way of taking it for granted that his presence was always acceptable. She missed the entertaining and suggestive way Steve had of discussing phases and experiences of life that the generality of men did not seem to trouble themselves about, and she missed that quick observation and perceptive sense that was ever finding new beauties in Nature and the things around him. Steve never jarred ; he might have his gloomy moods, but then they were not those of the simply morose man or the one who cries over spilt milk ; they were rather those of the man who, pondering

over the mysteries of life, is weighed down for the time being by the sense of their inexplicable import. When at last she saw that Paul's persistent seeking of her company, and Steve's continual engagement elsewhere, was something more than mere coincidence, she resented the situation, and resolved to find out the cause. With an utter absence of anything like vanity, the truth had not suggested itself to her. Steve had interested her in an unusual degree, and apart from the life of the man which had appealed to her, she recognized the finer fibre of his mind to those around him, and was secretly pleased on discovering that she was the only woman who seemed to interest him ; therefore, when he suddenly appeared to care no more for her society, she speculated as to how she had offended. Despite her knowledge of the world, it was a proof of her simple-mindedness that she did not solve the situation. She was determined to find out for herself what it all meant, and if she had offended in any way, she was ready to beg forgiveness.

This readiness in a woman to own herself in the wrong, and to beg forgiveness, is, in the eyes of a right-thinking man, one of the noblest attributes in woman, for he recognizes the goodness of heart that

prompts the action, and he loves and respects her moral courage.

One bright, clear afternoon her opportunity came. Immediately after lunch Mr. Macdonald and the Doctor took their departure down the creek to look for prairie-chickens in the undergrowth, while the others remained in the post. Mrs. Grainger had intimated her intention of writing some letters, which would go in with the mail that would be sent on to Calumet next day by one of the half-breeds. Miss Macdonald was standing in the porch of the general room when she saw Steve passing, clad in buffalo coat and beaver cap, and with a species of alpenstock in his hand.

"You seem going on a journey," she remarked.

"Only a short one," he observed cheerily; "to the summit at the Head of the Mountain. There's an old trail that leads to the top, but I haven't been up it for many a long day. It isn't, however, very difficult, and I hope to do it in three-quarters of an hour."

"Oh, take me with you!" she exclaimed impulsively, her eyes sparkling in anticipation of the trip. "I can climb splendidly, and I have wanted so badly to get a view from the top. I am told it is

magnificent, and at this time of the year it should be something quite out of the common. Oh, no, I'm not joking—won't you take me?"

She noted in an instant how his face clouded over, and a hint of embarrassment crept into his manner. He paused awkwardly before speaking.

"I shouldn't advise you to tackle it," he said. "I'm not too sure of the trail, and it's a steep climb. Besides, Paul is waiting for you, I know; he thought you'd like to go fishing."

"I did think you were truthful," she remarked with a show of resentment and the suspicion of a faint flush on her cheeks. "I told your brother yesterday I was tired of fishing, and wouldn't trouble about it any more."

"Then, I fancy, he expects you want to go somewhere else," he rejoined carelessly, and as if he had not noticed the asperity in her voice.

"Oh, then, of course, if you'd rather go alone, it doesn't matter"—this in a matter-of-fact tone of unconcern—"I wasn't aware your brother expected me to go anywhere with him this afternoon; but, anyhow, it is pleasant to meet someone who doesn't mind wasting a little time upon a woman. I hope you'll have a good time."

She vouchsafed him the faintest of nods, and turned as if to go inside.

"Come, don't be a silly!" he cried, forgetting for the moment that he was not on the old footing with her. But he recovered himself as he saw the look of cold surprise upon her face, and hastened to say, "I'm sorry, and I didn't mean to put it quite that way. You know how much in reality I'd like to have you with me, but Paul will be so disappointed. Come, by all means, and I'll go and ask Paul to come too."

She paused a moment as if to consider, but he saw she had made up her mind to come with him; it struck him she did not particularly hail with satisfaction his suggestion to bring his brother.

"Go in, and put on your mocassins, mitts, and a short skirt," he said, in that almost imperative way he had, and which somehow she never thought of resenting. "I'll go and hunt up Paul."

She had disappeared inside before he finished speaking. With a vague uneasiness he turned to look for Paul, but his brother stood beside him. Before he could speak, the latter said:

"I heard you; I was just coming to ask her if she'd come out with me."

"It seems she has been dying to climb the mountain. Why didn't you find out and offer to take her up? Now she wants to go up with me, but she wants you to go too."

Paul looked at his brother with a thoughtful but odd smile upon his face.

"You're not a particularly good hand at telling a lie, Steve," he remarked grimly, "but I give you credit for meaning well. Why on earth did you let Miss Macdonald get so chummy with you to begin with? I don't think it was right of you. You ought to have known you couldn't be more to her than the merest casual acquaintance. You haven't a hundred-dollar bill to bless yourself with—it wasn't honourable—"

"For God's sake, Paul, don't talk so loud! I'm not aware that I meant anything, and I think you're making a mountain out of a mole-hill. I'd stay behind now, if I could, and let you go instead, but it would look queer. Go and put on your coat like a good fellow, and come with us."

Steve was reaping the whirlwind just then with a vengeance. He knew in his inmost heart that he loved the woman whom they were talking about, and he had something more than a mere suspicion

that she did not look with indifference upon him ; but he also knew that he had no right to love her, and that it was doing her a great wrong, considering his worldly position, to permit or encourage in the very slightest degree such a state of things. True, since Paul had appeared upon the field, he had kept out of the way and denied himself the pleasure of her society as much as it was possible to do under the circumstances, though it was crucifying the spirit within him to do so. He was paying dearly, as all men must pay, for a life of carelessness that amounted to sin ; but he felt that part of his expiation must be of his own working out, and that must consist of his own abnegation and the furthering of his brother's suit. Paul, however, was not to be so easily talked over. He was one of those strong men who can sacrifice their feelings to policy when the case demands.

"No, Steve, I shan't go," he said. "Maybe I have been making myself just a trifle too cheap. Just you tell Miss Macdonald from me that I wouldn't climb that hill if Queen Victoria herself came and asked me as a personal favour to do so. That'll be one for her ; and, as for you, take care,

and remember what I said. It's only for your own good, mind!"

"Don't be afraid, Paul; I'm really sorry you can't come, but I'll do you no harm if I can help it."

Paul passed on, and in a few minutes more Miss Macdonald re-appeared. She was dressed in a short skirt *à la vivandière*, neat buck-skin mocassins, and leggings of the same material, flowered and fringed after the manner of the half-breeds; a short fur jacket, with pockets on either side, into which she could put her hands; and a natty beaver cap—altogether a very becoming and serviceable dress for mountaineering in such a climate. In her hands, which were encased in gauntleted beaver mitts, she carried a long stick with an iron spike at one end.

She made a pretty picture, and as Steve looked at her he thought that she was by far and away the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. The soft glow of health was in her cheek, and its limpid lustre in her dark hazel eyes. Her hair—undoubtedly the crowning charm of a woman's beauty—which was of unusual luxuriance, was massed over her ears in swelling picturesque ripples, and caught up

behind her shapely head in heavy gleaming coils. She was an interesting and uncommon type; for though of a happy and vivacious temperament, which showed in the sudden lighting up and animation of her features when speaking to anyone, there was a thoughtful and almost pensive look in her eyes when in repose that was calculated to arouse considerable speculation in the enquiring mind.

Nor was that interest in any way diminished when one got to know her, for, apart from her decided originality, absence of mannerism, and fair-minded way of looking at things, there was an undercurrent of romance in her nature which made her chivalrous and above all things womanly. She was very strong in that which makes a woman womanly.

She did not judge men and things from too strained a point of morality, although her own life was blameless, and this made her ever-merciful to those in trouble, and helpful to the weak. Perhaps the man or woman who prides himself or herself upon being the possessor of immaculate virtue, and whose virtues after all are only of the negative order, is the most hopeless and unlovable

of all God's creatures; for it is often the consciousness of human imperfections in one's self that tends to love and sympathy towards others. She was not exempt from the so-called weaknesses of her sex, therefore she did not pose as that which she was not. It was the light and shade in her character that gave breadth and charm to her manifest womanliness.

She noted Steve's approving gaze.

"Shall I do?" she asked smilingly.

"Oh, you're all right," he replied, with an awkward show of indifference.

She laughed, and watched him thoughtfully as he examined a set of field-glasses with apparent interest.

"Thanks," she rejoined, still studying his face; "I'm glad you're satisfied. It would have been a mistake to waste your stock of compliments."

"I'm glad to think they would have been wasted. Not being accustomed to deal in such things, I haven't got the art—it mostly seems an art—of paying them."

"Well, a woman, though she may like them, generally takes them for what they are worth, anyhow. Isn't your brother coming?"

"No, I fancy he did too much walking in the forenoon. I'm sorry he can't come. Let us start."

She made neither sign nor expression of regret.

They walked eastward across the lake on the snow-covered ice to where there were the ruins of an old saw-mill, and then struck the lumber trail that wound up the steep side of the mountain, and down which the giant pines had been skidded. There was little snow in that exposed spot, and what there was of it was frozen on the top, and rendered travelling comparatively easy. In the shadow and shelter of the great pines there was a great quiet—a stillness in which the slightest sound was intensified tenfold, seeming only to accentuate its profoundness. They walked side by side for some considerable distance without speaking, the man purposely shortening his steps and taking it easy on account of his companion, though in all truth he need hardly have done so, for she stepped out lightly and freely, as if accustomed to such work. As they got higher and higher, the stillness and the gloom seemed living presences in the deep close aisles of those stately pines. If they paused for a moment to take breath, the throbbing of their own pulses came home to them with an unpleasant

accentuation. There was no song of bird or sound of rill in that lonely, ice-bound brooding wilderness—nothing to disturb the silence as of death that characterised the mood, the immobility of Nature, in that wild spot, save only their own two selves, and they seemed too impressed by its spirit to dare break it.

At times they came to an open space where the steep trail took a sharp turn, and they had to climb warily over the frozen ice or snow, and make use of their alpenstocks. They had agreed not to look round, so that when they reached the summit they might experience all at once the full force and grandeur of the view in its entirety. But it was a sad temptation, and several times the girl declared, laughingly, she could stand it no longer, and must needs look, when the man would admonish her sternly, and call on her to remember Lot's wife. Then the trail seemed to cease, and only a few pine trees found a precarious footing on the scanty soil.

There were now only a few hundred feet before the great table-land at the summit could be reached, but those few hundred feet seemed very formidable indeed.

The face of the mountain was almost precipitous, and it would require the greatest skill and caution to scale it without a mishap. They had sat down for a brief breathing space, and to keep themselves from looking at the view, they looked at the ground and at one another.

"Don't you think you've had enough of this?" he asked, eyeing her dubiously. "It isn't exactly child's play to tackle the remaining distance, not to speak of its being dangerous; so, perhaps, it's hardly worth it. We'll look round if you like."

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed. "What, turn back now when we've come so far! Not I! One might never get the chance again. You must think I'm made of poor stuff to be unable to climb a little hill like this. Are you ready to go on?"

"I wish I had brought a rope to tie you to me," he said thoughtfully, by way of answer.

"That would be funny, wouldn't it, to have a woman tied to you?" She laughed, being evidently in one of her mischievous moods. "Were you ever tied to a woman?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied grimly, and without looking at her, "and it was a very tragic piece of business, although some people might say it was rather funny.

But I could hardly tell you about it—you're too young."

She regarded the twinkle in his eyes soberly.

"I think you must have been a very dreadful character once upon a time," she rejoined in a matter-of-fact way. "Of course I'd like to hear about it, but don't tell me if it's too bad." She appeared to take the matter lightly, but it jarred upon her unpleasantly all the same.

Steve hesitated. Here now was the chance he wanted. If he only told her this story in a certain way, without any taint in the manner of telling, but leaving her to draw her own conclusions, then there would be nothing left for her to do but to drop him as an undesirable acquaintance. He remembered how a very long time ago a married woman of his acquaintance, who had a great influence over him, dropped him in a similar way because she had seen him under the influence of liquor, leaving him to sink or swim just when he most needed a friend, and when a few timely, kindly words of re-assurance would have kept him right. Afterwards she told him, when he twitted her as to the strength of her friendship, that it was not for his unfortunate mistake, but for some other

reason she dropped him. But he had been dropped all the same, and the conclusion was obvious. Now, by merely giving his story a certain turn, he would effectually destroy any slight preference she had for him, and indirectly aid Paul. It was a hard thing to do, but he would do it.

"It's a long story, and I can hardly tell you here," he began, "but it was in the days when I was with the buffalo hunters, and we used occasionally to have big fights with the Indians. We had been having a battle with some Sarcees, and I had unhorsed one of their head men, a splendidly brave fellow whom I had often heard about. He was lying on the ground at my mercy, and—contrary to my usual style, I can tell you—I hesitated to kill him. When he called on me to shoot him, admitting himself in my power, I told him not to be an ass, but to hook it"—he looked away from the bright eyes of the girl as she smiled thoughtfully upon him. "Of course, I didn't put it exactly that way, but I told him to clear out, and he cleared. Two years afterwards I was taken prisoner by these same Sarcees, and led away to be tortured. They tied me to a stake, and built a fire round me; but before doing that they gave me fits with

their knives. Look here!"—he bared his right wrist and showed the scars on it. "Hilloa! I'm so sorry; I didn't mean to frighten you."

"You didn't frighten me"—but she stopped short, and he could not see her eyes. He hastened to continue his story.

"Well, it was a queer sort of experience to be watching those fellows piling up that wood. You'd imagine a fellow would be terribly frightened; but, do you know, I've a theory that in most men there is a latent power that enables them to rise to the inevitable, while perhaps the same men at any other time would shudder at the sight of a caterpillar. When the pain from my wrists ceased to hurt, I took a species of privileged and private views of some of the pictures my past life afforded, and though most of them were anything but satisfactory, the very fact of doing so seemed to give me a melancholy satisfaction. And then something happened that sounds like melodrama, and I hate melodrama as a rule. The very same head-man whose life I had spared two years before, rode into the camp and recognized me. Of course nothing was too good for me then. I was unbound, and such a ridiculous fuss as those savages made I never

saw in my life. To cut a long story short, they wanted to make me a chief right there and then, and when some more of them, who also had met me before, indulged in a pow-wow out of compliment to me, well, they did lay it on thick, and no mistake."

"But what about the—that woman?" interrupted the girl in a low voice that seemed destitute of feeling.

"I was just coming to that"—and here he realized that he was sorry he had ever begun the story. When he looked at her he felt his courage ebbing away. "When I told them I really couldn't accept such a great honour, they wouldn't listen to me, and so I became a Sarcee chief, and I believe am one to this day. But, what is more serious, the head-man explained that the warrior who was betrothed to his daughter had just been slain in battle, and nothing could possibly fit in better than that I should take the dead man's place. And so it came about that, willy nilly, I was betrothed to the fair 'Silver Moon.'"

"You could not help it," she interrupted, looking at him fixedly; "but I'm sorry I asked you to tell the story."

"And I'm sorry I told you. But aren't you annoyed? Don't you think I'm hardly a — well, hardly a respectable sort of person to know?"

"I really was to blame in asking about things that didn't concern me," she rejoined; "but, at the same time, I can't quite see what you've got to blame yourself for. Do you take me for a prude? Do you suppose I'd drop you for such a thing?"

He saw his motive in telling the story had missed its mark, and he had only succeeded in causing her pain. But still he thought of Paul, and made an effort to brazen it out.

"People have dropped me for less," he said.

"Then I'm sorry for such people, and glad for your sake."

"You're just a trifle hard upon such people; for I daresay it's only human nature to run with the crowd, only I felt it the more as I am really very, very fond of those I regard as friends. My likings die terribly hard."

"But you yourself aren't narrow. I fancy you'd forgive a good deal; and you've seen a good deal of the seamy side of things."

"That's just it; it's a mistake to suppose that if

a man's a man at all, the world should have a hardening effect. If a man's mental vision is not perverted, he's bound to see a great deal that is good and beautiful in the world—much more indeed than what is evil. For instance, it was a Jew pedlar who was the means of my eventually getting away from those Sarcees, and he helped me at the imminent risk of his own life. Now, I had always been down on the Jews—purely prejudice and nothing else, I can see plainly—and had said unkind things about them. I will never do so again as long as I live. This absurd racial prejudice in the world is a great curse."

"Oh, then, you got away from the Indians?" She looked up at him eagerly. "Were you long with them? I thought you said something about having a woman tied to you."

"I was a fool to say so," he admitted. "I never even saw the woman I was betrothed to—made my wounds an excuse, and all that sort of thing. It must have been a happy release for her."

He rose to his feet.

"Come, do you think you can tackle the remaining distance, or shall we look at the view and go back?"

She regarded him thoughtfully before speaking.

"I wonder what your motive was in telling me that story," she remarked. "Yes, we'll go on to the top now that we are here."

CHAPTER IX.

AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

STEVE IRONSIDE and his companion had to look to their footing now, for in some places the face of the steep hillside was as a boy's slide on a stone pavement. To quote the original remark of one of Mr. Pickwick's followers when he ventured on the pond, it was slippery. At one place Steve had to go on ahead and cut holes in the hard, glassy surface, so that Ruth Macdonald might have some sort of footing. As he cut his way up, tomahawk in hand, over the steep, dangerous-looking shelf of ice that swelled out like the neck of a bottle, the girl watched him thoughtfully. He was a fine figure of a man, broad shouldered, yet spare, and wiry as a wild-cat, with a frank, kindly expression in his gray eyes, and that look on his face that speaks of indomitable courage; the sort of man you

could safely trust your life with in a dangerous emergency. His dress was a typical one. Short, shaggy, buffalo coat, with deep collar, and broad leather straps across the chest, after the manner of that most picturesque of military bodies, the North-West Mounted Police. On his head he wore a shaggy cap of unplucked beaver, and great, red, felt stockings, reaching to the knee, gave colour to his costume. Hand over hand he climbed with a wonderful agility, and a cool indifference born of a steady eye and iron nerves. When he reached the top he leant back on his alpenstock, and shot down the icy shelf at a sickening rate, pulling himself up short at her feet.

"Now," he said, putting one end of a long red silk scarf he unwound from his waist in her left hand, "hold on to this, and it will help to steady you. I'll keep the other end, and you can bear on it as much as you like. Use your hands as well as your feet, and whatever you do, don't look back. Let me tie it round your left wrist." And without waiting for permission he made one end secure. He wound the other round his right hand.

"It seems to me rather a one-sided arrangement,"

she observed. "Now, supposing I was to slip and pull on the scarf when you were unprepared to bear my weight, I'd take you with me."

"If I was to allow myself to be unprepared for one single moment I daresay you would," he replied smilingly; "but that's not at all likely. If, however, that does come about, I'd much rather go with you than remain behind."

She looked up at him quickly with an odd smile. This was not much like the man who said he never dealt in compliments.

"Now I'm ready," she observed laughingly. "After you, please."

In a few minutes more they were picking their way foot by foot over the great rounded shoulder of the summit. A false step and they would be shot into mid-air, and their bodies would have to fall several hundred feet before touching earth. Their footing was so precarious that a breath of wind would almost have been enough to dislodge them. It surely was a reprehensible thing to undertake such a climb. But never once did the girl betray the slightest fear. The man was the personification of care, and took every step with the utmost deliberation, encouraging his companion in

a quiet, confident voice. When he took a step upwards he allowed the scarf to be slackened between them, and she remained still; and when she proceeded to climb he turned and watched her, keeping a light, wary hold upon the silken rope, and telling her what to do.

Once she slipped and fell forward on the slippery surface, her alpenstock flying from her hand and disappearing over the ledge, there being no lanyard attached. In another second she would in all probability have followed it over the face of that nightmarish cliff had not the scarf tightened on her left wrist, and a quiet, steady voice cried :

“Lie perfectly still, I can hold you. Dig your feet well into the notches, and raise yourself so as to grip on the next step.”

Despairingly she had looked behind her as she lay prone, her cheek pressing against the cold surface of snow and ice. The experience was a sickening one. Several yards below her she saw the polished, blue ledge silhouetted against what seemed to be misty, infinite space, and nothing more. She realized that if her body shot over there, it meant good-bye to this world. The horrible blank in the earth's surface fascinated her, but she

tore her eyes away, and forced herself to look upwards. Her right hand and arm were almost doubled up beneath her, and when she tried to raise herself she lacked the strength.

"I can't do it!" she gasped, trying to keep down a tendency to panic. "I can't possibly do it!"

"Just rest a minute. You'll be able to do it in another minute or so."

The calm assurance in his voice gave her courage. She made another attempt, and he pulled gently but firmly on her left wrist. If that scarf were to part, or the knot to become unloosed, it meant a swift but horrible death. Her shaking limbs gathered strength, and she moved her body ever so little.

"That's right," he cried, "just another inch like that and you'll do it."

Her whole body strained and quivered. She disengaged her right hand and raised herself to her full height. He pulled on the scarf, and in another instant her hands had found and held the notches in the ice.

"Now," he said, "look up, and climb like a cat. I've got you safe enough; a few yards more and we're safe."

"You'd better disengage your hand from the scarf," she observed, "I might pull you over."

"You've got to climb," he insisted. "Right foot first, then your left; get your hands well into the steps. That's right, a yard or two more will do it. You *can* climb, and no mistake. Now rest, three steps more." She screwed up her courage to sticking point, and took three deliberate steps. "Now, only two more——"

And as she reached the top he fairly drew her to him in his excitement. He led her without speaking into a little hollow where there was a knoll with the bracken peeping through the snow, and sat down. She noticed that he was white to the lips, and shook as if with ague.

"I've frightened you!" she cried remorsefully.

"I admit you did," he rejoined, finding his voice, "but it was all my fault, taking you up a place like that. I've done many an insane thing in my time, and come out scot-free, and without giving the matter a thought afterwards, but that was the maddest thing that ever I did. I'll never forgive myself—I should never——"

"Oh, come, come, what nonsense!" she interposed lightly. "You know very well I made you

climb that shelf. You had no choice in the matter, you had to do what I told you."

"That's where I erred," he interrupted with quiet force; "but you could never make me do it again—that's to say, let *you* do it. It's child's play to me, but it's another thing for a woman. I told you once before that the best thing you could do was to drop me. I haven't been accustomed to the society of women, and I'm always doing something wrong. I'm not like the men you have been used to, and I'm afraid never shall be."

There was a hopeless ring in his voice, and a weary look in his eyes that she had seen there more than once.

She put one hand lightly on his shoulder, and looked down into his face.

"No, you are not like the other men I know, and have known," she said, "and I don't want you to be. If you only could see things as I do, you would not want to be different. You are yourself, and that's more than most men are."

And then as if conscious that she had as usual allowed her feelings to get the better of her, and said just a little too much, she laughed, and continued:

"I've a favour to ask—will you grant it?"

"That depends," he answered with reservation. "I can see you want looking after. Do you want to go down again by the way you came up? for if you do, I say *No!* So there!"

"Oh, you—man!" she laughed, "I'm not quite so bad as all that. I only want you to say you won't tell anyone at the Post about that little incident—if they knew, it would only worry my father, and he would never let me go out on a trip like this again. Although you saved my life when I lost my pole and fell, I know you don't mind foregoing that honour"—he made an impatient movement—"I know it, and am not likely to forget it——"

"I think we'd better say nothing more about it," he interrupted, rising to his feet, "I'll do as you wish. We've got about another hundred yards to do, and then for the view. I feel all right again. You didn't hurt yourself, did you?"

It was, perhaps, after all, not an odd thing when one came to think of it, that the man who had watched the preparations made by Indians for burning him alive, had done so with comparative composure, and yet had collapsed utterly as soon

as he had realized that the life of this girl was saved.

But Miss Macdonald declared she was none the worse for her horrible experience, and they began to ascend the now perfectly safe, but rather rough, remaining ground.

As if by a mutual understanding to shake off the effects of the late depressing incident, they tabooed the subject altogether, and talked of lighter things. He told her an amusing story in connection with the courtship of Pierre the French-Canadian cook; and they both had to sit down on a snow-bank to laugh again at a certain ludicrous, and not a little mischievous, contingency which she advanced regarding it. Indeed, so great was their reaction of spirits that they were in danger of not getting to the summit at all, for it is impossible to do much climbing, and to talk and laugh at the same time.

A stranger, to have come upon them just then, would have thought that they were very old and intimate friends indeed, that they had a very great deal in common, and seemed to suit each other remarkably well. Indeed, she was the only woman in whose company Steve could ever lose sight of

himself and his surroundings. She seemed to understand him, and respond to his moods, and what was more, find something that interested her in them. And in truth, they had much in common; they both had the same marked dislike for mere conventionality and humbug. If they did not care for anyone, they always avoided that person, neither wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, nor yet desiring to be hypocrites. Their tastes were similar; they were both great readers, and in the man's case it was wonderful how in his wandering life, and limited opportunities of getting books, he had managed to acquire such a varied fund of knowledge. Perhaps the secret lay in his natural thirst for knowledge, in the infinite trouble he had always taken to get only the very best books, and in his retentive memory. In short, the one saw in the other what they considered the highest attributes of man and woman, side by side with no inconsiderable indication of the old Adam and the original Eve.

He made her take the silk scarf again, and literally pulled her to the top.

"And now look round!" he exclaimed, with an unwonted flourish of his right hand, and the light of a rare enthusiasm in his eyes, indicating his love

of wild Nature, and the power it had to stir his pulses. "It's one thing to see it in summer, but now——"

And the words died, as words must die upon the lips of those who try to speak of such a scene. They looked, and they became dumb, seeing what was surely a revelation of the glory of God.

They stood on the roof of the world, and gazed down upon an apparently limitless land draped in virgin snows. There were no signs of man's presence in that primeval scene, they were utterly alone—units, atoms on the surface of a dead sphere whirling in space. Had it not been for the bright sunshine it would have been the very embodiment of desolation and death, it lay so still—so weirdly, pathetically still.

It might, indeed, have been a scene evolved from chaos on which no eye had ever looked. They stood enthroned on a mighty rock in a desert land, but it was a land that stretched on and on into what seemed limitless space, and was white as the robe of God Himself. To the east, and north, and to the south, that unfettered expanse seemed to creep up and up until the horizon—the world's farthest rim—blended with the pearly grey of infinite space where

suns and moons and stars pursued their ways in harmony. The thought bore home the immeasurable magnitude of the grand scheme of Creation, and the infinitesimal part our earth plays in its working—a mere speck of earth held in space by the laws that govern other spheres, a mote of dust in a shaft of light. It made the brain reel to think of it.

But here and there on that far-stretching prairie-land, like dusky veins on white marble, one could trace the interminable, wandering line that spoke of the thin belt of timber or undergrowth marking the course of some creek, and far away to the north, some twenty miles and more, was a great brown object like a mammoth snake dragging its heavy coils across the landscape. It was the high, brown, precipitous banks which mark the mighty Saskatchewan. Almost directly beneath them at their feet was the crater-like valley, with its pine-shrouded sides and ice-bound lake covered with snow. Looking keenly, close to the mountain side, they could just detect a few small dots, with a suspicion of a thin wreath of smoke in the air, that betokened the presence of the Post.

But far away to the west was the crowning feature

of the scene. Across what seemed to be a great partially timbered valley, and vast stretches of prairie-land on the other side of that again, and high above what appeared to be the limit of the horizon, there shot up from misty space, towering into the heavens, great snow-clad mountain peaks, with jet-black seams and scars adown their sides. As they looked a rosy flush crept into the western sky as the sun prepared to go down behind those hills where lay the land of the spirits—the happy hunting grounds where all good Indians go. They were a soul-inspiring sight those everlasting hills, they seemed so tangible yet so unreal—a vision of the sublime.

“What mountains are these?” cried the girl, as if doubting the evidence of her senses. “There are none, surely, on this side of the Rockies.”

“*They are the Rockies!*” was the awed reply, “and they are much more than a hundred miles away. I have heard from the Indians that on very rare occasions they are to be seen, but could not believe it. Did you ever in your life see anything half so wonderful?”

He turned and looked at her. His voice broke the spell that like a presence seemed to exercise

an overpowering influence over them. She shivered slightly, and awoke as from a day-dream.

"It is too wonderful for words," she answered in a low voice. "It is as if those hills were the gates of heaven, and that light was the glory beyond."

"They couldn't preach a sermon like that in church, could they?" he observed. "Can you wonder now how it is that people who are much alone with Nature, and see such sights as these, are seldom or never atheists?"

"No, or else they are blinded with their own conceit," she rejoined decisively. "But oh! look!—see what is happening now!"

The sun was dipping behind the mighty peaks which were silhouetted against a blood-red background, and as they looked the tawny yellows above them changed to purple and gold; they seemed traced in lines of living fire, and for an instant stood out with startling distinctness. Then there came a change so sudden that it seemed little short of enchantment, but considering the immense distance that lay between these mountains and themselves, and the various intervening air-currents conducive to sudden atmospherical changes, it was not so strange. At the same moment as those

giant mountains stood out brightest, a thin gauzy veil was drawn over the face of the heavens, as if to shut out the glory of the scene. It broadened, deepened, and in another minute the mountains had vanished into air, and in their place was nothing but a warm, pearly after-glow.

“‘*Sic transit gloria mundi*,’” exclaimed the woman.

“So be it,” said the man, as with a sigh he turned and drew a hand across his eyes. “It is as if I had seen something that man is rarely permitted to see—something that will stay with me for ever. But we’d better get back. It will be dark in another hour or so. If we travel eastward along this plateau for about half a mile, we shall strike the old trail that I was fool enough to leave, and the rest will be easy enough. Look! there are the Bear Paw Mountains in Montana. That is Uncle Sam’s country, and a jolly good country too it is. I look forward to the day when we shall all be as one people and one nation, and that will be the truest guarantee for peace throughout the world.”

CHAPTER X.

REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

THERE was not much snow on that exposed plateau, so that walking was comparatively easy work. They came to a place where it was crowned with great gloomy pines, and wended their way through a winding, natural avenue, which, in the old days, when the old Fort Macleod trail ran through it, was called The Avenue, and then they struck the steep trail going down the side of the mountain into the valley again. How picturesque and beautiful were some of those pine trees silhouetted darkly against the evening sky, their delicate coral-like branches standing out clearly cut and distinct like the finest lace or filigree work. A sharp frost had set in, and every now and again they could hear the dead timber crackle as Jack Frost squeezed it in his cold embrace. In the pale

heavens a few early stars came out, seeming strangely out of place in a land where the daylight still lingered, and where it surely did not matter whether there was light or not. It was as if lamps were burning in a city of the dead while the sun still shone. The dusk came on apace, but it did not take long to go down hill. When they passed out of the timber, and reached the valley, there across the lake in the shadow of the mountain and the pines lay the Post, its twinkling eyes of fire looking out cheerily on the gathering gloom and the weary land.

They had exchanged but few words for some time, and it was evident that both the man and the woman were busily engaged with their own thoughts. It was one of the odd phases of their friendship that, at times, they would preserve long intervals of silence, and yet neither of them would think it strange. It was as if the mere fact of their being together were intercourse enough; that they understood each other, and there was no need of words. The woman was the first to break the silence.

"I suppose we'll be going back to Calumet in a few days," she said, "and then when the thaw comes

in the spring my father and I shall be going back to Ottawa."

The man started and roused himself from a train of thought which of late he had striven to banish from his mind. What she said broke in upon his dream ruthlessly, and brought him back to the vexed and almost tragic question of the present. Was he forgetting that he had no right to dream such dreams, and that he had pledged himself not to interfere with, but rather to further, Paul's suit? If so, he must bethink himself, and beware, for such a course could only end in disappointment and sorrow. He had faced many an unpleasant thing in his time, but nothing compared to this.

"Yes, I suppose you will be going back," he repeated weakly, as if dallying with the question; "but sometimes I'm not so sure about it. I've got a presentiment that many things will happen before the thaw comes."

"What do you mean?" she asked somewhat sharply, being unable to account for an unwonted note of hidden meaning in his speech. He glanced at her enquiringly; those little outbreaks, if such they could be called, seemed so foreign to her real nature. But she merely laughed, as she generally

did on such occasions, and as if rather amused with herself. He appeared relieved, and answered :

“Only that, as I told your father the other night, I believe the half-breeds and Indians are going to rise, and that there will be horrible trouble in the land. I don’t want to frighten you, and I know you’re not easily scared, but when those French half-breeds—remember they’re more savage than white men—get excited, they are fanatics of the most dangerous description, and would rather wade through blood than not. Remember, that is only when they are roused ; if you go to them as a stranger in need, or if they like you, they are the personification of goodness itself. It’s chaps like Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, and others, who do all the mischief. I have lived amongst them, and I should know.”

“Yes, I’ve not forgotten you are a Sarcee chief. Do you still carry your scalps about with you?”

He could see her great lustrous eyes glancing up at him with mock fear in the half light, and the naïve expression of deference on her fair young face. He thought it was a very beautiful and interesting face indeed.

"You are laughing," he remarked, "and I daresay you, like many more, consider me an old croaker; I can only hope you'll prove me one."

"Come, come now!" she interrupted, in that conciliating way which with her was so real and so effective, "you know very well in your heart that I don't consider you an old croaker. Why will you always disparage yourself?"

"Because"—and it was part of the whirlwind he reaped—"you seem to forget that I have had a past. You must have heard of it—everybody in Calumet has—and it seems to me you need reminding of it."

"Why! What do you mean?" she asked surprisedly.

Now was his chance, and he went on with pitiless candour.

"Because I've been a wild, reckless sort of chap the greater part of my life—the sort of man that a properly living, church-going people, such as there are in these parts, very naturally do not care to have anything to do with."

"Oh, that's all nonsense! They all like you!"

"That doesn't alter the fact that I've been a careless-living man, and that once upon a time

they wouldn't have cared about my associating with their sons and daughters."

"I am not defending careless living, far from it, but these same people think me also beyond redemption because I have ceased going to their Meeting-house. Anyhow, is the opinion of extremists any criterion of a man or woman's true character? I have found out many things since I have been amongst them, and I prefer to judge for myself. I should have been unjust many a time if I had gone by what they said. But I will say this, that I think you are wrong in imputing opinions to them which they do not hold about you. You are too introspective, and you have brooded over your past until it has become a regular bogey in your eyes. I haven't the slightest desire to flatter you, and I have no motive in doing so, but since you seem to take the matter so much to heart, I may say—and I'll put it as modestly as possible—that you're rather a somebody with your fellow-citizens than otherwise."

He shook his head.

"You are too charitable in your estimate of others," he continued, "but that doesn't alter the fact that I have been what the world calls a ne'er-do-well; and I reckon the world is about right in

its judgment. I daresay it's all very well, and sounds romantic to lead the sort of life I've led, but it resolves itself into this. I had no right to indulge those wild notions of leading the life of a mere adventurer, I who was born and brought up to be something better. I couldn't afford it, but I did it, and it was neither fair to my relations nor to myself. I admit I was not suited for the life they meant for me."

"Then you would neither have succeeded in it nor yet have been happy. Say it was your misfortune to be so constituted, but don't blame yourself for what you couldn't help."

He made a sudden gesture of dissent.

"How many men before me have had to embark in what to them was thoroughly distasteful, who have had to go on with it to the bitter end, and have proved themselves heroes in the truest sense of the word. What's more, the life I followed led to other things—fighting in questionable causes, drinking, and a dozen other things. You may say I'm on the right track now, but it's too late, and I realize how I've wasted my life. Oh, yes, I've got to pay for it—I'm reaping the whirlwind with a vengeance." He laughed a short, bitter laugh

that startled her with its significance. "Now, there's my brother Paul, whom I daresay I've often laughed at; he is something like a man, since you're talking about men. He has not given way, like me, to any vagabond notions that he may have had; he has worked hard and done well, and, what's more, he has led a blameless life. If I lived to the age of Methuselah I would never be half the man he is. And, by the way, do you know, I believe he has got a very great respect and liking for you." The woman looked up suddenly into the man's face, and regarded him significantly; her lips moved, but she did not speak. "He's what they call a rough diamond, and the more you see of him the better you'll like him. I'd like you to be good friends."

"Well, we are friends; what more would you want?" She laughed, but there was a note of uneasiness in her voice.

He glanced at her furtively, and his expression was haggard. It was like plucking at his own heart strings, but still he remembered his position, what he had promised his brother, and spoke accordingly.

"I'm not quite sure but that I'm saying more than I ought to," he said, trying to speak easily

and in a casual way; "but I've seen a good deal of you since you came to Calumet, and since you speak about going east again, I'm somewhat loth to lose sight of you. I won't forget those little skating trips we used to have up to the Red Cliffs on moonlight nights together"—she was watching his face intently and biting her lips—"and I think we got to understand, and be quite frank with each other, didn't we?"

"We certainly saw more of each other, and seemed to understand each other better, than we've done of late," she answered, with a hint of coldness in her voice; "but I can't quite make out what you're driving at."

He either did not or would not see the drift of her first remark, and as for her second, he felt very much inclined to jib at it, like a faint-hearted horse before a stiff fence, but he blundered on instead.

"What I meant to say was this," he continued. "You and I know each other well enough to be frank, without any suspicion of presuming on friendship, so I hope you won't take amiss what I am going to say to you now."

He paused awkwardly for a moment, but the woman remained silent.

"It was about Paul ; he is really one of the best-hearted fellows who walks in shoe-leather, though some people who don't quite understand him hardly give him credit for it."

"Why do you consider it necessary to defend your brother? Have I called his good qualities in question?"

"No, but it's this way. It's rather difficult for some people to understand him, and he's such an undemonstrative sort of man, that I often wondered of late if you have guessed his feelings towards you. But you've been a good deal together since we've been here, and I expect you have guessed them. If so, I can only hope that you'll see him as he really is, one of the best fellows under the sun, and perhaps you'll not be in such a hurry to go east and leave us after all? Now, do you see what I was driving at? I hope I haven't put my foot in it and offended you?"

Just at that moment there leapt into the northern sky a great fan-shaped arc of light. Its mighty shafts of flame rolled from one side of the heavens to the other, crossing and re-crossing like a phantom army of giants changing front, and flashing into the blue night their silvery and pearly rays. It

was one of the most gorgeous displays in Nature, the Northern Aurora. It lit up that desolate, snow-bound land until it gleamed ghostly white as in the moonlight; and as Ruth Macdonald stopped short to face Steve Ironside, its soft tremulous glory shone full upon her face. Steve waited for her to speak. When she did so, it was in a voice that was calm but ominous in its suggestion of suppressed feeling.

"I hardly know whether to be angry with you or not," she observed, "and I certainly did think you would have known better than to speak as you have done, for I cannot quite see what should have led you to do it. Are you so very anxious that I should marry your brother?"

"I thought it would be better if you did so," he answered lamely.

"And in the name of goodness, why? You try my patience, and I am disappointed with you. You almost remind me of one of those crass-minded, officious match-makers that you find in out-of-the-way places where people fossilize. Your brother has certainly been what I daresay you'd call very attentive, but not more so than heaps of other men have been, who never for a moment dreamt of being

understood to mean anything in particular. And now, since you have broached the subject, I may as well tell you that, though I haven't the very slightest doubt but that your brother is all you say he is, he is not the sort of man I'd care to marry at all. You seem to think I must be in a great hurry to marry. To begin with, he and I have hardly an idea in common, nor more than I suppose you and he have. He may have money and all the virtues under the sun, but that won't guarantee happiness. There's more than that needed, and I believe you know it; you've said as much to me before. When you see unhappy marriages in the world, you'll generally find that the people who entered into them prided themselves upon what they called their practical common-sense and hard-headedness, and arranged matters in their own way, leaving out of the question what was the most important point of all, that of love. Now, I'm pretty sure there is no love, in the sense I refer to, between your brother and me; so please do not speak like that again."

He looked away from her with a troubled countenance. Feeling in his heart the bitterness of a passion that he knew was hopeless, he was genuinely

sorry when he speculated on the disappointment that awaited his brother, whom he felt desired a better fate.

They stood facing each other on the white surface of the frozen lake ; the pine-clad mountain to the south looming up mysteriously, its giant bulk relieved by touches of phosphorescent fire on the bare spurs where the rays of the Aurora lingered. In the great calm they could hear a subdued, rustling, rushing sound, as of far-off myriads of winged bodies passing through the air. It was the weird accompaniment of the Aurora, which no one yet has been able to account for, and which can only be heard in such vast solitudes.

"Then, I am at least glad you have told me of your indifference to Paul," he observed, after a pause, "for now I know you will guard against allowing him to continue in his mistake. For goodness sake, don't let him get to like you any more than he does, or it will be so hard upon him !"

"I don't think your brother is the man to allow that sort of thing to upset him ; his pride and self-esteem would be hurt before his heart. You must have a pretty poor opinion of me to think I require warning in such a matter."

She looked at him resentfully.

"Perhaps I wasn't thinking so much about you in particular as about your sex," he observed, with a little more firmness. "I think that, as a rule, what I refer to is one of the most common and weakest points in a woman's character. Women seem to like the admiration of men, and though they pretend to scorn the idea, they are not at all particular as to how they encourage or allow a man to delude himself with hope so long as they are gratifying their craving for attention or perhaps something a little stronger. When they find that they have achieved their purpose, and can go no further, they are generally mercilessly, pitilessly cruel, whether they mean it or not, and do not hesitate to break off in the most abrupt fashion, making all sorts of excuses—falsehoods generally—to explain their action and save what little sense of decency they have left. They will even adopt a high moral tone, and suddenly discover that they have been doing wrong—that is the lowest depth of all. No, I don't think that women feel so deeply in such matters as men; they nearly always forget sooner."

"What do you mean?" she interrupted hotly.

Her eyes were fairly glowing with indignation, and something else that was perhaps more obvious in the trembling of her lips. "You talk as if I had been guilty of some indiscretion, or worse. I never gave your brother the slightest reason in the world to imagine I encouraged him, and for the sake of my own self-respect I do not see why I should alter my conduct towards him. What on earth makes you talk like that I'm quite at a loss to make out! You've changed altogether of late. You seem anxious to get rid of me, but, of course, you have got the remedy in your own hands; you need not speak to me. You—"

"Good God!" cried the man brokenly, turning away. "You will not understand. If you only knew, you would not say that. Anxious to get rid of you! and I am breaking my heart for the love of you!"

He turned and faced her boldly, looking into her eyes as if his whole soul were in them. "Yes, now since you've spoken as you have done, and it's no longer any treachery to my brother, I may tell you that I have loved you from the first minute we met, with all the heart and with all the soul that is in me. Yes, I would sell my soul for you,

I believe; but that's not the sort of love a good woman wants—the love that costs hell-fire.”

He came closer and gripped her by the arm; his whole face seemed transfigured and worked with emotion. For a moment the sudden change in him had taken her aback, but she recovered herself in an instant, and watched him with an inscrutable look in her eyes. She remained silent, and he went on again.

“I daresay you didn't know what you were preparing for me, or you'd have given me my walking-ticket out of pity long ago. It would have been a merciful act to have done it then, before it came to this. But I interested you, and I was allowed to see a good deal of you. God only knows why a man who has led the sort of life I've done should interest a woman, but I've found it generally is so. You liked me because I perhaps looked upon things a little differently from most men, and had sufficient conscience left not to be a hypocrite. Perhaps I was interesting—for, of course, you, like everyone else in Calumet, knew something of my history—as a unique phase of regeneration—anyhow, that doesn't matter. The comparative absence of hard and fast social lines in a place like Calumet,

permitted us to be a good deal together ; but when I realized that we were drifting into deep water, and it was folly, and even criminal folly, on my part to let it go further—for I was little better than a pauper with a blasted reputation—I purposely avoided you, although to me it was tasting of hell to do so. Then my brother, whom I owe so much to, came on the scene, and, trusting me with his confidence, I felt it was my duty to help him. Now you know why I spoke as I did when I saw you did not quite make him out ; I tried to clear the way for a better understanding ; I also thought it was just possible that, unintentionally, you might let him delude himself, and that would be one of the greatest evils any woman could bring upon an honest man deserving of success but not understanding women.”

“Do you understand women?” she asked, with something like a challenge in her voice, and a hint of pity and resentment in her eyes.

He regarded her apprehensively for a moment, then turned away his head, shaking like a leaf the while.

“Sometimes I have thought I understood you,” he replied quietly, “and sometimes I have not.”

One thing I do believe of you is, that you are a good woman, and will try to forget what I have said to-night. Perhaps I should not have said it, but under the circumstances I had to tell you. It need make no difference to you; you'll be going east again in the spring, and mixing with very different sort of people; and, anyhow, there is no reason why you should think of me."

"Are you quite so sure of that?"

She said this in a low, strangely matter-of-fact voice, and slightly turned away her head. Then, as she lifted her eyes and looked into his, he understood her.

He took a step forward, caught her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Bless you for saying that," he exclaimed, releasing her; "you have made me a better and a stronger man, and if I have kissed you it has done no harm to either of us. If every woman only had the courage to tell the man she likes, but cannot marry, that she was not indifferent to him, she would not only make him stronger, but would make him respect her all the more. I may see little of you in the future, but whether I do or not, the thought of you will be a help to me. Let us make

for the Post ; they will be wondering what has kept us."

And either he did not or would not see that look in the woman's eyes, which plainly said that love might overcome all things.

CHAPTER XI.

ENTER TRAGEDY.

IT is the last week in March, black night, and the soft Chinook wind sighing over Calumet. *Drip, drip, drip!* from overhanging banks and eaves of houses, as the snow melts before the warm breath of that mysterious but welcome maiden who hails from southern climes. *Drip, drip, drip!* and every now and again from the river banks a sudden ominous crash, as some suspended cornice of ice loses its grip on the clay, and shivers like a load of crystal on the dull, damp surface below. *Drip, drip, drip!* black pools of water everywhere; a ghastly mist enveloping the little town; and deceptively luminous, ragged-edged lights moving hurriedly and furtively about, as if those who bore them were afraid that their presence might betray them to some enemy.

And well might they be afraid; for the fanatic Louis Riel had stirred up the *metis* and the Indians, and now there was grim rebellion and much bloodshed in the land. Only a few weeks before had come the news of a concerted movement of the rebels, led by the wily, mocassined generals. The actual rising had been sudden, but not quite unexpected by those who knew the secret-working ways of the men who had some measure of savage blood in their veins. Every man in Calumet had shouldered a musket—indeed, during the winter, they had been organized into a species of militia corps, and Commissioner Macdonald had taken the command.

Three parts of the little band had moved off to the principal seat of the rising that lay to the north-west, to which point the rebels were converging. Of course the Commissioner went with them. Some thirty men were set apart to stay behind and guard the little town against any sudden attack on the part of the Indians in that quarter; for some of the tribes, with characteristic prudence, having hung back in a neutral attitude until they could find out as to how the struggle

would go, might be expected to assume the aggressive at any moment. Paul Ironside was left in charge of the town-guard; and much against his will and inclination, Steve, who had wanted to go with the outgoing force, was left behind too. The powers that were had secretly decreed that two or three of the very best and most trustworthy men should be left behind with the others to guard their homes and little ones; and Steve had been one of the first selected accordingly.

But most of those who were left behind had laughed at the idea of danger. They were far from the seat of trouble, and nothing could happen unless indeed some of the neutral Indians rose and sneaked silently on Calumet. But, of course, it is the unexpected that always happens; so now on this gray March night, just when the ice on the river threatened an early break-up, and a warm Chinook wind had fetched a welcome thaw, there came, as if to precipitate matters, the news borne by a ragged and worn-out police scout named Paterson, who had ridden his horse nearly to death in his endeavours to warn Calumet in time, that a large band of Indians was rapidly approaching

with hostile designs. The noble red man had seized his opportunity.

* * * * *

Only the sigh and the sough of the wind, and the eternal *drip, drip, drip* of the quickly melting snows; only the gray night with the three-quarter-moon showing dimly and fitfully through gathering moisture-laden cloud-racks; only the long, dark patches of bare earth relieved by dully-gleaming and growing pools of inky water between the ghostly, rib-like, and fast disappearing snow-wreaths. Darkened windows now, so as not to draw the fire of an unseen enemy; dark forms flitting about stealthily and with evident purpose in the cheerless gloom; but no panic; no signs of fear; few sounds save those which Nature makes when struggling out of her long, winter sleep. Ever and anon from the frozen river where the ice—three feet thick at least—is straining under the pressure of rising waters, comes a startling, ominous crack, and a growl that seems to grow and travel like a peal of thunder. But there is little to tell that murder is in the air, that grim tragedy is walking the land, and that the break of day will reveal clotted crimson

stains upon the snow. How often has man's blood, shed by man, and staining the white robe of God, cried out in dumb but eloquent protest as if for judgment!

* * * * *

A little body of fur-clad men are grouped together in a dark, open shed on the edge of the little town, not far from the banks of the great river. Each one carries a rifle in his hand, and one who is evidently the leader is addressing them in a quick, authoritative and purpose-like tone. It is Paul Ironside.

"Fall in," he says, "and number off from the right."

They number off quickly. Paul's command, if not strictly conforming to those found in the most recent drill books, had at least the merit of being practical, and suited to the training of those under him.

"Number ten," he continues, "you are last man of number one company; now, you ten men will march off to the right when I give the word of command. Number ten, when you have marched off twenty paces, you will tap the man in front of

you on the shoulder, wheel about, and look out for cover in the shadow, but so as to command a view of the river. Number nine, you will do the same to number eight, and so on until you are spread out so as to protect one side of the town. You will remain at your posts till further orders, challenging anyone that approaches. I shall visit each man at intervals during the night, and the password will be 'Saskatchewan.' Number one squad—right turn, quick march!"

The ten men moved off. Then other ten men were apportioned in a like manner to the left, and the leader was left alone. But he did not remain idle; he visited the other side of the little town at certain points of which he had posted two or three trustworthy men. By every one of these men in turn he was challenged. He had given orders to such townspeople as were unable to fight—principally the very young and the very old—to stay indoors. The result was that the main street of Calumet was as desolate as that of any plague-stricken city. Paul rather forgot the regimental rôle he had adopted when he came to one of his sentries.

"Halt: who comes there?" cried the sentry.

"Hilloa, Steve, is that you?" cried the visiting officer in a weak moment.

"Advance one, and give the countersign!" commanded the Prodigal coming to the "ready," but with that peculiar dryness in his voice that sometimes betrayed the latent humour in the man.

"Oh, the *Saskatchewan*—and I'd like to duck you in it," answered Paul, with an unwonted cheerfulness that sounded pleasantly in his brother's ears. "And look here, Steve, Quesnelle says there are a number of half-breeds with the Indians—together, he thinks, about two hundred—there are thirty of us; do you think we can stand them off till the Mounted Police come up?"

"That depends," answered Steve. "If the Indians don't come to-night, I guess we'll be able to laugh at them to-morrow. The ice on the river is bound to break up before many hours—just listen to it now!"

Above the tireless *drip* of the melting snows in the black, furtive shadows, above the mysterious voices and whisperings—the pangs that accompanied the birth of the year's first-born, spring—which were borne to them on the moist warm breath of the Chinook, there came again the weird and

ominous sound. Sometimes it began like a pistol-shot heard far up the river. Then for a second or two there would be a death-like stillness. But listen! that silence is but the recruiting interval in which a gigantic unseen force—the pressure of a mighty river's ever-growing current on a Titanic roof of ice—is concentrating its energies on one particular spot; for now the welling waters press against the icy roof of their prison: there is a loud, wildly-irregular, sickening sound not unlike the crackle of a thunderbolt; and then with a hollow boom and a roar the great rent travels down the ice, right in the centre of the stream, with a deliberate, pitiless potency that is portentous of the mightier ruin yet to come.

"I believe you're right," answered Paul, as a startling and louder crack than usual grew out of the silence, and travelling down the river, died away again with an ever weakening echo in the distance. "Oh, I say, Steve, I wonder if the Macdonalds managed to move across their goods from the house over the way?"

"Good God!", exclaimed Steve, with significant emphasis, as if some undreamt of contingency had just suggested itself to him. "Do you mean to tell

me that you don't even know if Miss Macdonald is in town? I've been at the ranche all day and have heard nothing. I never dreamt but that you'd made everyone leave t'other side."

"I understood they were coming across to-day," explained Paul, doggedly, but betraying considerable anxiety in his voice; "and you must recollect that a few hours ago there was neither danger from the Indians nor yet the river. Go you to Watts, Steve—tell Wallace there on your right, and I'll tell Donald Young to close in upon your beat—see if they're not there; I'll go to the house they were going to move into—it's a queer thing I didn't think of this sooner; but there wasn't time to think."

In another second Paul had hurried off. To do the man justice, when the news came regarding the Indians, who were then only a matter of ten miles from the town, the calls upon his time and help were too great to permit of him thinking of the safety of individual families. He, naturally enough, supposed that under the circumstances, no one would require any telling.

Ten minutes later the brothers met. They each had the usual story in such cases to tell. The

different households they had visited declared that, when they did happen to think of the Macdonalds at all, they supposed they must have gone either into their own new house or a neighbour's for the time being.

"Look here, Paul," said Steve, "you tell the men along the line, and I'll slip across the river and fetch the Macdonalds over; it's not too late yet!"

"You're going!" echoed Paul. "Oh, no, it's my place, Steve; and to explain the situation, I may as well tell you now as later on, that when Macdonald comes back I'm going to ask his permission to—"

"I understand," interrupted the Prodigal in a harsh, dry voice; "but from what I know of you, Paul, I wouldn't be surprised to hear that you hadn't sounded the lady first, so 's to learn what her mind might be in the matter. You've worked hard, and you deserve all your prosperity, but as I've told you before, you make the mistake of a good many more, and fancy that gold can buy everything—it's a thundering mistake. Hilloa! Look there!"

The two men had been facing the river as they spoke. Suddenly, as they looked into the misty

night, away across the blurred space somewhere in the neighbourhood of the opposite bank, a little tongue of fire had spurted out; almost ere its flash had died another sprang into momentary life; and following close upon them, the one breaking in upon the other, came a couple of hollow-sounding rifle shots.

"If the Indians haven't attacked the house already!" cried Steve, "then Moffat has seen them and is signalling to us—why didn't he try and cross with the women? Look here, Paul, we're wasting precious time; what you'd like to do and what it is your duty to do, are two different things—you've got to look after your men—it's no business of yours to go risking your life—it doesn't matter a red cent about a chap like me. S'long, I'm off to fetch them across!"

And before his brother could say a word or prevent him, Steve had leapt down the bank, and in another minute was lost to sight in the gray night. In a few minutes more the little cordon of men were peering anxiously, and not a little impatiently, into the gloom. But they knew that where one man might pass with safety, two or more would only be the means of precipitating an

attack from the Indians; and if they would save their homes and little ones from imminent danger, it was necessary to remain simply on the defensive as long as possible, so as to give the Mounted Police, a troop of which was expected at any time in Calumet, a chance of coming up.

CHAPTER XII.

“WILL YOU PROMISE ME ONE THING?”

WHEN Steve Ironside sprang down the treacherous bank and sped across the moist, dull ice there was a very hell of conflicting emotions within him. He had cherished a fond, wild hope in his heart, and had been confronted with an ironic phantom that represented the utter absurdity and futility of that hope. Yes, he realized at last the Nemesis that waits upon unrecking, mis-spent lives. If he had paused for a moment to think of what his intercourse with the Commissioner's daughter might lead to, surely he would have drawn back in fear, and never have spoken to her again. For how could the once abandoned Prodigal of Calumet hope for that hand which even his brother, the richest man in the province, might be considered presumptuous in aspiring to? But so it was, that while in his

secret heart Steve should hope, his own utter and ineffable folly stared him in the face. It was one of those things that constitute the so-called ironies of life.

But Steve, with all his frailties and weaknesses, was not one who, looking only at the outside of things, straightway adopted a pernicious philosophy, and considered himself the sport of the "God of the Immortals"—as if the "God of the Immortals" would stoop to toy with the creatures of his own creation! Steve was made of sterner stuff; he saw the just and higher will behind the natural law. In the past he had not at first flown the temptation as many another weaker but wiser mortal in the world's ways had done, but had succumbed to it—he had sown the wind, and he was reaping the whirlwind. He knew that if there were no such things as law and order, reward and punishment in the world, we should very soon efface ourselves. Why should he be an exception to the universal law? The fiery furnace in which the gold of humanity is refined was Steve Ironside's hell just then.

But the present called him to action. Stooping, and with rifle at the trail, he sped along, now in

the black shadow of the high and thickly-timbered little island that lay within a stone-throw of the Calumet shore, and then with a run sliding along one of the long, bare strips of dull ice in a crouching position, so that he might not be so readily seen should an enemy be on the outlook.

But Steve, by reason of his wanderings on the prairie, was almost as much an adept at the strategies of Indian warfare as the red man himself. He sped along noiselessly as a shadow, he seemed almost as unsubstantial as one. He had nearly reached the opposite bank, having with a cat-like spring jumped across the little strip of open water that separated the ice from the bank, when *ping!* and he experienced something like a prick from a red-hot needle in the fleshy part of his left arm. It was a close call, and for a second he hardly knew whether or not his arm had been rendered useless by the enemy's bullet.

In another moment the passion-tossed Prodigal was the old wild Steve of the prairies, and that lion-like courage and fighting power, which had made even the dare-devil "bad man" of the west treat him with a certain amount of deference, once more asserted itself. He sprang up the bank as

an angry tiger might spring—with two great leaps he was in the centre of a little patch of long, coarse reeds—in another second he was atop of a surprised and struggling Indian, pressing back a hand that held a long, glittering knife, wrenching it back till the muscles of the agonised victim twitched in pain, and the knife dropped from the strained, outstretched palm. There was a knee on the red man's chest that pressed the life out of him; the grip of iron-like fingers round a throat in which the cries for help were throttled until they became inarticulate sounds, and the fear of death was in a quaking heart.

Steve had known better than shoot his would-be murderer, for the other Indians skulking about would know the ping of their fellow's rifle, and a strange one following on it would only arouse their suspicions. A month or so ago the Indian's knife would, doubtless, in Steve's hands, have cut short the former's life, but now the Prodigal hesitated. In another minute he had only left behind him an unconscious red-skin, who would give no further trouble for some time to come.

In two minutes more Steve had, in cover of a narrow passage cut through a huge bank of snow,

reached the lean-to at the back of a good-sized weather-boarded house, and tapped at the door for admittance. Ere it was opened a rifle bullet splintered the woodwork close to his head, and he knew that the Indians had seen him. It was, perhaps, as well he did not know that he came very near being shot by the active but somewhat impetuous man-servant, Sammy Moffat, from the inside of the house. For that individual, despite the fact that Steve spoke tolerably good Queen's English, was firmly convinced that it was some bold Indian who was trying to force admittance, and would have shot him through the window, which he had partially unshuttered for that purpose, had not Miss Macdonald caught him by the arm and pulled him forcibly back. To unbar the door was the next thing to be done; in another instant Steve stood inside.

The woman caught him by the arm and led him through the dark passage into the lighted kitchen so that she might identify her visitor. He noted that she was dressed in furs, as if she had just been getting ready to make good her escape when surprised by the Indians. She turned to look at the white man who had come to their aid. As soon

as her eyes met his she started involuntarily. Apparently annoyed with herself, she released her hold upon his sleeve, as if it had been some noxious reptile she had inadvertently touched, but there was no look of horror on her face; yet there was fear without aversion—a look as if she almost questioned his right to be there. A few months before she had laughingly called him her fellow-sinner, and put her arm in his in a friendly fashion; now she drew herself up, and slightly back, regarding him with a proud, startled, almost disdainful stare. The delicate colour had died out of her fair skin, and her breath came quickly. What was the matter with the girl that she should let the presence of the Prodigal of Calumet move her thus?—what had he done? Nothing, surely; the idea, my masters, were too preposterous!

He resented the challenge in her eyes—there is no language on earth so intelligible as that of the eyes to those who can read it aright—and hastened to say:

“I was sent to help you get out of this. It seems the Indians are skulking all round the place, but their intention is to make a raid on Calumet. We must stand them off from the upstairs windows

till help comes, and must take care not to show a light. There are shutters on the lower windows, and the doors are good: they will stand a fair amount of peppering. Miss Macdonald, you and your maid must go into some inner room out of danger's way. Sammy, you come with me upstairs." It seemed as if the man had taken command of the house already.

As for the woman, it was as if she had not heard his speech, for her eyes were regarding the sleeve of his coat with a peculiarly concentrated stare. Blood usually calls up such a look.

"They have hit you!" she cried. "You are covered with blood; your left side and your coat sleeve are drenched with it—you must let me do something for you."

She was a woman again; for the startled look of horror that had followed quickly upon the proud, distant stare was but momentary. She looked at him steadily, as if daring him to discover aught of pity in her eyes; but she caught him by one hand for all that, and forced him to be seated.

"We must stop the bleeding," she continued quickly. "It is your left arm—we must cut open the coat sleeve. I can make a turnoquet, and bind

it up. I've been taught to do such things. Give me my shears, Elizabeth—quick, and fetch me some linen—take a sheet—a pillow-slip—anything.”

The terrified maid did her bidding as quickly as she could. Sammy Moffat, the little Hibernian man-servant who was as courageous as a tiger but could not bear the sight of blood, ascended to the upper storey to reconnoitre through the windows of darkened rooms, and Steve was left alone with the two women.

Afterwards he wondered how he ever allowed a dainty and fastidious woman to do a surgeon's sickening work—doubtless the girl herself wondered afterwards how she was equal to the task. That she was fit for it is one of those things that go to refute the allegations of the woman-hater, for, thank goodness, there are thousands of loving and noble-minded women in the world.

Before the operation was completed there was a sharp *zip!* the splintering of wood, and they knew that a bullet had embedded itself in the casement of the window. But Ruth Macdonald had not even turned to look at the spot; she went on calmly and expeditiously with her work. When it was finished Steve seized his rifle again.

"You will let me thank you in my own way," he said. "You've more than repaid that little obligation you sometimes will insist on referring to. I'm no good at thanking anyone in words." In another minute he was with the man-servant upstairs.

* * * * *

Another hour, and close to an upper window a grim, determined man was crouching, every now and again raising his rifle cautiously, and firing at some shadowy, skulking forms that were gradually closing round the doomed house. Every now and again the stooping figure of a woman glided stealthily into the room and handed the man some cartridges. More than once she even took the rifle from him and loaded it herself, in spite of his entreaties, and even commands, that she should keep away from him and not expose herself to the bullets that every few minutes came whizzing in through the shattered window panes, ripping up the wainscotting, or more often tearing a hole in the plastered ceiling, filling the already dense, sulphurous atmosphere of the room with a fine, choking, blinding dust. The man was becoming

weak on account of the blood he had lost, and the woman was becoming faint by reason of the stifling fumes. Entering the room on one occasion she said :

"Moffat has been wounded in the shoulder, and three Indians are in one of the outhouses. They can't possibly send us help from the town—I doubt if they can save themselves—the Indians are surrounding it now—just look!"

From where they were they could see, in the dark, shadowy distance across the Saskatchewan, a number of small but lurid jets of fire spurting out at irregular intervals. From the horseshoe bend on their side of the river a wicked and withering fire was being kept up, obviously in reply to that from Calumet. It was clear that this opposing force made so sure of the inmates of the Commissioner's house that they were not wasting time over it, two or three could watch it till they were ready. The morn would soon break, but if the Mounted Police did not come, or the river break up, the Indians must take the town.

"We must get back across the river," Steve at last said to the girl, "it is our only chance, for they will burn the house down before long. There

is that passage cut through the snow leading to the river; we might get down through it without being seen."

He groped his way into the next room and found Moffat; then he discovered Miss Macdonald's maid, who was helpless through sheer fright, and sent the two downstairs before him. Half-way down the flight of steps Ruth Macdonald stopped under a lamp in which there was a feebly burning light, and turning to him, said quickly:

"Will you promise me one thing?"

He looked into those eyes that showed no signs of terror, and on the face that had always seemed to him full of some subtle charm, so different from any other woman's he had ever known. But that face was now somewhat grimed with smoke, and there was even a suspicion of blood upon it, and yet he realized what the spirit of the beauty was that haunted it—it was the reflection of the mind of a high-souled woman. He wondered, even then, that he should ever have thought her a mere butterfly of the fashionable world. But she caught him by the hand and looked earnestly into his face.

"I will promise you anything," he replied almost without thinking, but meaning what he said.

"Then if you see I am likely to be taken, will you——"

She did not finish the sentence. but glanced significantly at the rifle he held in his hand, then tapped herself lightly on the breast with one finger.

There was not a tremor in her voice as she spoke, or the slightest fear on her face as she motioned to herself.

"I understand," he answered in a peculiarly dry, hard voice. "Yes, it would be the greatest kindness I could do you—but it has not come to that yet."

"You are a good man and a brave one," she exclaimed gratefully. "I always thought I could trust you."

Yes, my masters, there are other promises on earth besides those which lovers make, that can call the love-light into the eyes of a true woman.

They grouped behind Steve in the little passage. He held his long Colts revolver in his hand, and there was an alert, firm look on his face. The door was shivering and splintering beneath heavy blows—it was giving way, and in another minute would be dashed in.

"Put out the lights," Steve whispered. "Stand back a little, and be ready to follow me."

The lights were put out, and in another second they were in darkness. Steve removed the heavy bar from the doorway. In another instant the head of an axe came crashing through the powerful lock, and dashed the door open. Against the sombre-toned dawnlight three fantastic figures with great feathers in their hair loomed up indistinctly.

Ping! ping! thud! and two of them dropped like bullocks when they have been pole-axed in the yard. The third levelled his rifle in the direction of the unseen executioner, but before he could fire a woman had brushed past Steve and dashed the rifle upwards. The charge exploded, but harmlessly in air, and in another second the third Indian's blood was mingling with that of his two comrades. The woman had undoubtedly saved Steve's life.

"You're a brick!" cried poor Steve. He was merely expressing his gratitude, and it was the only thing he could think of saying just then. "Now, follow me. We've cleared the coast. The other Indians are probably further up the river; we may escape them yet."

They sped across the now quivering and

water-covered ice. Another hundred yards, and they would reach the little wooded island that lay well towards the other shore. The darkness was passing away, and a cheerless, cold, gray dawn was taking its place, revealing the black river banks, and the white patches of snow and ice still clinging to them. There came the sound of irregular firing from Calumet, and they were wondering at, and congratulating themselves upon their escape so far, when suddenly there was a sharp *ping* from the river bank behind them, and Sammy Moffat fell forward on his face.

“Bad luck to them, shure!” cried poor wounded Sammy as he lay prone, his grimed, weather-beaten old cheek resting on the chill, damp ice, with the blood oozing from a wound in his shoulder, and another in the leg. “Hurry up with the women to the island, Steve me bhoy—dhivil a fut can I go further, so don’t waste time over a goner like me. An’ I say, Steve”—and there was actually a gleam of humour in the Irishman’s eyes as he spoke—“an’ juist give me compliments to the Reverend Mister Clarkson, an’ tell ’im I wasn’t a bit scared of that hell of his—for *I don’t believe there’s no such place!*”

A wounded man and a frail girl pulled Sammy, in spite of his protestations, across the remaining hundred yards of slippery ice to the wooded island. They could not now go any farther even if they durst, so they sought out a spot from which the snow had melted and prepared to await events. Gray-eyed morn was fast flooding the world with its wan light, but the horrors of the night had not yet passed. In the township of Calumet strange scenes were being enacted.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RED DAWN.

IT was a unique attack in the annals of *metis** and Indian warfare made that night on Calumet. Though Paul Ironside had taken every precaution lying in his power to guard against surprise, he hardly thought that those Breeds and Indians, who hitherto had preserved a neutral attitude, would rise and try to take the town. When they did so they must have thought that it was left comparatively unprotected.

When Steve Ironside had suddenly broken away to the assistance of Commissioner Macdonald's household, it was only a sense of the duty devolving on him that prevented Paul following him up and assisting in the rescue. As leader of the

* Half-breed,

defence party he had no time for useless reflections ; his ready and practical ability to repel an attack were soon to be put to the proof—the lives of women and children was something to put a man on his mettle. The conduct of Paul Ironside that night was a revelation to many, for, naturally enough, it is not the man whose principal quest is money that people look to for help in the time of trouble. Of course, no one can do without money, but in nine cases out of ten the too keen pursuit of it has a soul-narrowing effect, and does not conduce to moral courage. That Paul's better nature was not utterly dead, and that the true man in him had only suffered from a temporary perversion was abundantly proved before the sun rose again.

Hardly had the sound of firing across the river, in the neighbourhood of Commissioner Macdonald's house, apprised the citizens of Calumet that in all probability the presence of Steve Ironside had been discovered and a grim little siege was in progress, than they were called to a sense of their own imminent danger in a decidedly alarming fashion. They found themselves attacked on the south and west sides of the town. The Breeds and Indians

had crossed the river, and in cover of a fringe of undergrowth opened fire on the defenders, who were forced to seek cover indiscriminately in the nearest houses. There, however, for some hours, from loop-holes and windows, they successfully kept the enemy at bay. Contrary to expectations the heavy clouds had lifted, and the three-quarter moon enabled them to sustain a desultory fire with some degree of certainty. No one could have done his duty under the circumstances better than Paul; he stole from house to outhouse, where his men had entrenched themselves, at as much personal risk from the bullets of friends as of foes, encouraging them by his presence and assuring them that if they could only hold out till morning, the Mounted Police would be sure to come to the rescue. Perhaps he paid more attention to the firing that was going on across the river than was altogether discreet under the pressing danger of his surroundings. He had never been remarkable for courage, but something within the last few days had crept into his life, which convinced him that, after all, there was someone whom he held dearer than himself, and who had brought about this transformation.

There was a long low closed-in cattle shed, somewhat apart from the other buildings, in which two men belonging to the defence party had taken up their position. It stood at an angle of the town, and close to where the trail passed through a little thicket of birch trees and choke cherries. It was a point which, if the rebels could once gain, might be used by them to pour in an uninterrupted fire upon the town, and as a base of operations for attack. The men who held it now against the enemy were that plain-spoken Christian Isaac Watts, and Terence O'Donohue one of the chronic inebriates of Calumet. Strange to say, at the first signs of danger these two dissimilar men had both volunteered together for this advanced post which hitherto had been overlooked. To Paul and two or three more men who were guarding the Meeting-house, now crowded with women and children, it was evident that unless the outpost in question was speedily reinforced it must fall, and this would mean the beginning of the end. But who was to do it? Some two hundred yards of open ground had to be covered before any relief party could reach it, and this meant running the blockade of the enemy's fire.

"Who'll go to the relief of Watts and O'Donohue?" asked Paul Ironside, raising his voice, and looking around the church, where at each window a citizen was stationed rifle in hand. They were all prominent members belonging to the church of the United Christian Brethren, men of good social position—such as it meant in Calumet—and who were not in the habit of hiding their religious profession under a bushel. They belonged to Paul Ironside's order, representing that severely respectable and circumspect portion of the community who passed judgment on, and did not hesitate to condemn, such godless ne'er-do-wells as Stephen Ironside the wayward, or Terence O'Donohue and Sammy Moffat the wine-bibbers. When they were called upon to pray in public they never failed to rise to the occasion, but now that they were asked to give some other proof of their Christianity than mere profession, they hesitated.

For a minute or so there was a dead silence, only broken by the sharp crack of a rifle, or the *zip* and *crunch* of a bullet as it struck and embedded itself in the wooden walls. Each man tried to look as if Paul's question was not addressed to him in particular.

Just then, however, there was an interruption—the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard outside. In another minute the Reverend Thomas Clarkson had satisfied the sentry as to his identity, in default of the password, and stood in the doorway; just as Paul was repeating his question. Well might the people stare at their spiritual adviser, for the man seemed transformed. The usual expression of his face was ascetic and even melancholy, as if in his time he had drawn heavy drafts on the bank of emotion, and been forced to meet them with what remaining spirits and energy he possessed. Now there was an exalted look there instead, his eyes sparkled, and he appeared as if rather enjoying himself than otherwise. His seedy clothes were sodden and torn, and in one hand he carried a rusty old snider rifle. It was the first time anyone in the building had seen the man of peace with a weapon of any kind in his hand, and it struck more than Paul Ironside that he carried it with an ease and familiarity which suggested some considerable previous training. That old piece of gossip which one of his detractors had started some few years before, about the reverend gentleman having been seen many years previously.

wearing the uniform of a Chilian government, and proving his skill as a marksman during a civil war, did not now seem so very improbable. Still, as he had always been an advocate of peace, to see him now with that truculent light in his eyes, was to some of his admiring flock like having a species of very bad nightmare. He had that day been visiting a ranche which lay ten miles to the south, and having late in the evening become acquainted with some facts concerning the rising, he slung his carbine to the horn of the saddle, and rode post haste back to Calumet. Nor had the journey been without its dangers, for more than once had horse and rider floundered together in the treacherous snow-wreathes, and more than one bullet had whistled over his head as he galloped recklessly past and close to the rebel lines. As he stood there in the doorway he seemed to take in at a glance every aspect of the unwonted scene. Then someone in the crowd said something about prayer, and what followed is a matter of history to this day.

"Prayer!" echoed the man of God, contemptuously. "Jacob Thompson, you're a nice sort of man to talk about prayer. Next time when you want to pray in the house of God just wait till

you're asked. I've heard Paul Ironside ask for volunteers. A man who's scared to look down the barrel of a rifle or tackle a Niché hasn't got the grace of God in his heart!"

Zip! zip! c-r-unch! The bullets were beginning to play a very devil's tattoo on the wooden walls and iron roof; one made a neat little hole in a pane of glass and caused the plaster to fly on the opposite wall.

The Reverend Thomas made his way to the far end of the church, and looked out of a small lancet-shaped window.

"It's getting clearer," he remarked, "and I can see John Wallace's cow-shed plainly enough. Who's going to lend a hand there?"

Still no one spoke. Paul Ironside had made a step towards the door, but the preacher stopped him by a look.

Then the man of peace laughed, and there was a hard, dry ring in his voice. "Truly," he said, relapsing into the old sing-song style of the preacher, and adopting that quaint scriptural phraseology with which it was his wont to garnish his discourses, "the hearts of those who hitherto have waxed valiant in prayer, have utterly failed them in the

hour of need. It is as if the Lord had said—take the light out of that window-sill, Johnnie Mooney, you blockhead you, if you don't want to get a hole bored in your thick skull!"—And the stupidest man in Calumet smashed a small bracket-lamp in his eagerness to avert such a catastrophe.—"Better lower all these lights. And now, just another word, for I'm going myself to smite these Philistines hip and thigh; I'm glad for one thing this has happened, as I've found some of you out. I'll do my own praying here for the future. . . . Now, Paul Ironside, if you're game to follow me up, stuff your pockets full of cartridges and come on. I'm a man of peace, but—my pockets won't hold another cartridge, Thomas Menarey—woe be to the shedder of innocent blood, for by man shall it be shed.—The skulking hounds, for whom I've many a time put myself on short-commons to keep them from starvation!"

It was significant that those addressed looked anywhere but at the speaker or at one another. One not conversant with the circumstances would have thought that the good man's denunciation could not possibly have referred to them.

Then the Reverend Thomas turned and buttoned

up the collar of his shabby old frock coat to the chin; eased the trigger of his carbine; had a look at the breach in a most business-like fashion, and, without another word, passed out through the doorway.

Stooping, he ran swiftly across the road, where for sixty yards or so he was comparatively safe in shadow of a garden fence. In less time than it takes to write it, Paul was close at his heels. Together they reached the end of the fence, which could not have been more than a couple of hundred yards from the banks of the river. They stopped to take breath. With a stealth that would have done credit to the noble red man himself, the Reverend Thomas peered round the corner of the fence. Suddenly he turned and gripped Paul by the arm. His black eyes glittered with excitement, and there was a look as of triumph and gladness on his face.

"Look there—through the fence," he whispered hoarsely. "Now, don't you see a small patch of sage-brush about half-way between this and the river?"

Paul looked and nodded in the affirmative.

"Well then, two of [the] enemy have just

succeeded in getting to that point. Their game is to make for this fence, but they're going to get left. 'Truly the Lord hath delivered them into our hands. . . . ' Quick, do as I do."

To Paul's amazement, the worthy man ripped open his frock coat, sending the buttons flying right and left. Then he hung it over the muzzle of his rifle, and finished his scarecrow off by crowning it with his hat.

"Now, don't fire till I give the word," he said, "and keep cool. Here they come—do as I do, but don't expose yourself."

It was a strange state of affairs, truly, when the parson was ordering round the Commanding Officer. But Paul had no time to think of the topsy-turvydom of things; he had scarcely finished draping his rifle with his coat and hat when he heard the sound of footsteps close to the fence. In another moment the Reverend Thomas had raised his dummy and Paul followed his example. The two unseen enemies stopped running—*ping—ping!* and the parson's hat went skimming through the air, while a bullet glanced off the barrel of Paul's Winchester. In another moment the coats and

hats, which had proved such excellent decoys, were lying on the ground, and almost before the two half-breeds realized that they had been duped, they also were lying on the ground in a senseless condition. And to Paul the remarkable part of the proceedings was that neither he nor his companion had fired a shot. When Paul afterwards came to think about it in the cattle shed, it did not seem so very remarkable after all—considering the preacher's agility and technical skill—for the latter had wrenched a club like a young sapling from the fence, and, still carrying his carbine in his left hand, sprung upon the two astonished trespassers like a tiger-cat, and floored them right and left. Such an exhibition of prowess from a quarter so unexpected, almost took Paul's breath away.

"We shall have mercy and not sacrifice," glibly explained the man of God who had given this exhibition. "Now run for your life, and sing out the password before you get to the shed."

Ping, ping, whiz—zip! went the bullets, as the two men ran the gauntlet of the enemy's fire from the river bank. As for the Reverend Thomas he surely must have had some experience before of a like nature, for he zig-zagged as he ran, leaping

and crouching, so as to spoil the aim of his adversaries.

"*Saskatchewan!*" yelled Paul as they approached the shed; and then his foot slipped in the slush and he fell headlong, his rifle flying from his grasp. But with wonderful quickness his companion picked up the Winchester, helped him to his feet again, and placed it in his hands. At the same instant, so as to take them at a disadvantage, two or three dark forms rushed forward. But the long-haired parson in his shirt-sleeves was too quick for them. He levelled his rifle at the foremost who was an Indian—*ping*—and the renegade Sioux went to join his fellows in the happy hunting grounds. A bullet ripped open his shirt and grazed his left breast; but he stood his ground as coolly as if he had only come out there on purpose to amuse himself. A bullet from Paul's rifle stopped the second Indian, and as the third turned to seek once more the friendly shelter of the river bank, a little leaden messenger from the rusty old snider sent him to join his fellows in that land beyond the blood-red sunsets. In two minutes more Paul and his companion had reached the shed and joined Watts and O'Donohue. The surprise of the latter at seeing the worthy

parson—whose church he never could be prevailed upon to enter—was characteristic of the man.

“An shure, is it scrappin’ ye’ve been, Misther Clarkson?” he said, looking at the man of holy orders admiringly.

“Pooh, pooh! Terence O’Donohue,” was the somewhat dignified reply. “I never condescend to ‘scrap’; I only stretch forth my arm and lay my hand heavily on him who worketh evil. But get you and friend Isaac to that end of the shed, and Brother Ironside and I will to this. Don’t waste a shot.”

“Then, sorr, I’m hanged if I don’t come to your church for a month of Sundays! Thir must be some Christianity in a man who can foight with a shillalah in one hand and a rifle in t’other. More power to yer elbow sez oi!”

And from that day there was no more sincere convert in Calumet than Terence O’Donohue.

* * * * *

Another hour and the fierce little siege went on. More than once did the half-breeds and Indians try to rush the shed that acted as such a check to their onward progress. But the four watchful and

determined men who held it had the best of the situation, and never missed a shot. The rebels had tried to creep into the town at other points; but it was evident that Paul's commands were not all alike, for there were those who boldly came out into the open, so far as it was consistent with prudence, and shot the enemy down before they could gain the shelter of the houses.

A gray, sickly wan light was now stealing into the eastern sky, and in another half-hour or so the morn would break. The warm Chinook wind was sighing over Calumet; the snow-water fell from the eaves with a monotonous *drip, drip, drip!* or swirled in miniature rivulets down the little coulees that led to the river, and from the Saskatchewan itself there came at times those loud sickening reports and hollow booming sounds that seemed portentous of the ruin yet to come.

At one end of the long shed the preacher and Paul Ironside stood, rifle in hand, peering through the fissures in the slab-built walls. The firing had ceased for a few minutes, and the two men had time to exchange some further words.

"Paul," remarked the preacher, turning from his loop-hole in the gable end of the shed, and

regarding the man he addressed with a peculiarly quiet and observant manner, "I can't make out Macdonald's across the river yet, *but they've stopped firing there!* I wonder how it is with the women and your brother?"

It was as if a knife had struck home into the heart of Paul Ironside. He stepped quickly to the crevice the preacher had just left and looked—and listened. But he could see nothing as yet, save the misty grayness of the coming morn, and hear nothing but those portentous rumbling noises that came from the ice on the Saskatchewan. A horrible fear possessed him, schooled as he was to suppress his emotions. What was happening or had happened behind that gray mist-rack on the river? Oh, that he could but learn some portion of the truth, so as to be rid of the terrible suspense and uncertainty! What had come over him within the last twelve hours that he should trouble about others? Could it be that the experiences of that night had helped to remove some of the scales which perverted his mental eyesight, enabling him to see himself as others saw him—in all his pitiful self-centredness and want of true charity?

"Minister," he answered, hoarsely, "I can't bear to think of it—if these women are taken—"

"If Steve wasn't shot himself he'd never let them be taken—leastways, not alive," was the grim observation. "I've more faith in your brother than any other man in Calumet."

"I didn't think about him," was the somewhat sulky rejoinder; he resented the insinuation that his brother was a superior man to himself.

"And therein lies your sin, young man; you never have thought of him as you ought to have done. Paul Ironside, I'm going to speak plainly, because, from what I've seen of you to-night, you're not quite such a moral coward as I supposed—you're a long way ahead of those for whose good opinion you have stifled your natural instincts to command. I don't deny I, myself, till this night have been blind to the true characters of some of those canting hypocrites. The old saying is right after all, 'works and not words prove the man.' But you've been a vain deceiver of yourself, and what real charity you may have had in your heart, you've subordinated to a worldly doctrine, which, being purely temporal, cannot of course stand the test of time and trouble. I've watched you for

many a long day, and in your relations with your brother you've reminded me of the Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray, and said, 'Thank God I am not as other men are, like this poor publican—my brother.' It may be that you yet may have a chance to make amends and make a sacrifice—which is the true test of charity—for that brother, but if it is God's will that he has taken Steve to Himself in the discharge of his duty as a man, then, Brother Ironside, I'm sorry for you—you've lost a great chance of proving your Christianity, and I wouldn't stand in your shoes for all the gold in the Dominion of Canada!"

The Reverend Thomas mopped his forehead with his dirty shirt-sleeve, and then looked out carefully between the rough log slabs. But he could see nothing save the gray mist that hung low by the river bank, and he could hear nothing save the tireless *drip, drip, drip*, of the snow-water, and a far-off rumbling sound, like distant thunder, that seemed to come from up the reach. At last Paul spoke.

"I guess you're rather hard on me, didn't I clothe and feed him when he came back from—goodness knows where—without a red cent in his pocket?"

"Yes, after a fashion. I daresay he cost you as much as your name figured for on that big subscription list connected with the conversion of the Zulus which was hawked around last year."

"He had no claim on me, and he didn't deserve it!"

"Only the claim of a brother who had erred, and knew it. Had he not awakened to the error of his ways, your continual nagging and taunts would have been enough in itself to drive him back into a deeper hell than ever he sampled. Oh yes, Paul Ironside, it was a deed worthy of a brave man and a professed Christian, wasn't it, to rub it into him, when you knew you had him in your power and there wasn't much chance of his turning on you?—you who have more than once read that lesson about the forgiving of one's brother seventy-times seven."

Paul Ironside looked uncomfortable, and put two more cartridges into the magazine of his Winchester. What was the matter with the rebels that they were not renewing the attack?

"But when one man who has been a failure won't take the advice of another man who has been successful—what then?" Paul asked weakly.

"You make the mistake that many worthy self-made men make. Because Providence gave you more useful faculties, in a worldly sense, than your brother, and because you made money accordingly, you were puffed up, and gave yourself the credit and not God. You judged others by your own measure, and a bigoted intolerance of other people's shortcomings was the consequence. Paul Ironside, you've been a good friend to me—a better one than you've been to your own kith and kin, as I've often said before, but I've only told you what's been weighing on my mind for some time, for pride like yours is certain to have a fall sooner or later, and I only speak now in order to warn and save you from that fall. Remember, there are things in this world that even money cannot buy. . . . Look out, Paul!"

Ping—zip—cr-runch! and a bullet forced its way between two logs, embedding itself in the planking of the opposite wall, within half-an-inch of the speaker's head.

"Had I taken after my father and been an inch taller," remarked the Reverend Thomas, complaisantly, "I guess that bullet and I would have become acquainted." He put his eye to a crevice

and looked out ; then, forcing the muzzle of his carbine through an opening he had been operating on with his knife, he took what was evidently a careful aim, and fired.

"That fetched him!" he added contentedly, withdrawing his carbine and re-loading as if nothing particular had happened.

Another anxious and watchful half-hour passed in comparative silence. It was rudely broken in upon by a whistle expressive of surprise, and an excited exclamation from Isaac Watts. The preacher promptly enquired the reason.

"Look out towards the town!" cried Watts, by way of explanation, still keeping his own eye glued to an accommodating fissure.

The Reverend Thomas and Paul Ironside both looked through openings in the wall, and what they saw for the moment startled them with a sense of grim apprehension. Right in the centre of the town there rose up a great ruddy shaft of flame ; it made the neighbouring houses stand out black as jet in bold relief against it, and lit up the surrounding country. Paul gave a sharp cry which ended in something like a groan.

"What do you think it is, minister?" he asked,

brokenly, as if fearful to admit the truth of some dire catastrophe even to himself.

"I think what you also fear," quietly replied the preacher, "at least, that's where your place of business is, and I don't know of any other concern in the town that would make such a big blaze."—turning to Watts—"What do you think it is, Brother Isaac?"

"Brother Ironside's store it seems to me; but one can hardly tell at this distance."

"Truly, Brother Paul," remarked the Reverend Thomas, "it is as the second messenger came and said unto Job—'*The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burnt up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them.*' Only the fire of God in this case is the work of the aliens, and the sheep are thy worldly goods. Of a truth, 'the Lord gave and the Lord taketh away.' What sayest thou, Brother?"

"Only that I am not insured and it means ruin!" gasped Paul, after a significant pause. "It is all very well for you to preach and quote scripture, but you can't realize what it means to me."

"I can guess," was the reply. "But why do you take exception at me quoting from scripture

now ; I, myself, have heard you read that lesson from Job that speaks about the Lord taking away, and which concludes with these words of the patriarch—*'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'* Can't you apply what you preach, or are you only another fair-weather Christian ? ”

“It was different then,” groaned Paul, struggling manfully, it must be admitted, to take the matter in a proper spirit. “When I made that money there were few wants I could not satisfy with money, and it was no particular difficulty to me to make it ; but now it seems I've neglected something of greater importance—something that alone can help me, and which I had relied on money doing for me.”

“Humph ! ” snorted the preacher, “you have been one of those who, because they have beaten most men on their own ground, are puffed up with conceit, and think they are a match for the Almighty—yes, who will actually stake the gold God has given them against His own omnipotent laws, and who, of course, get euchred in the end.” He paused, and then patted Paul on the back—“But take heart of courage, Brother Paul ; I understand what you mean. Since you admit that

much there's hope for you ; there wasn't any when you held to your former beliefs. It's perhaps not so bad as you think."

And so it proved, for the next moment Terence O'Donohue cried :

"I say, Mither Ironside, shure an' it ain't your store ahfter all, it's only Tony McKibbin's hay corral an' stable that's took fire. I can see your place safe enough to the right of it. More power to yer elbow !"

They looked through the openings in the walls again to find it was as the Irishman had said. It was a consolatory thought in the mind of the parson when he afterwards came to think of it, that Paul Ironside betrayed no signs of undue jubilation over the fact ; the latter merely closed his eyes and remained silent for a few minutes.

The dawn had come at last, and very brown and desolate looked the steaming earth, which showed up here and there through its fast disappearing mantle of melting snow. There was a watery, wan gleam away in the east as the rising sun tried to assert itself. The township loomed up blackly and coldly. The sun peeped over the horizon, and, lo ! the gray mists lifted from the

broad river. It was a dreary dawn, and a bloody one, for Calumet.

At the far end of the shed Isaac Watts and the Irishman were dozing upon their feet now that a seeming respite had come. Only the preacher seemed alive to the gravity of the situation. He had taken up a position in a corner of the shed where he could command a view of the river bank; he, at least, did not seem to think that the danger was over.

"Paul," he remarked, after a pause, "I see the enemy gathering down by the river bank; it strikes me they're going to make a rush for this place and then right on to the town. I did wrong in letting you come with me—your place was in the township looking after your men.—But it's too late now. We'll die game anyhow if we have to. Terence O'Donohue, try and signal the men in the township. If Perry and the Mounted Police would only come, or the river break up, we'd turn the tables on them yet."

Paul Ironside listened to what the preacher said as one in a dream; it was evident he was thinking of something which to him was of greater importance. He had seated himself, as if tired out, on

an up-turned pail, leaning his head upon his hands. Suddenly he roused himself, and looked up into the preacher's face.

"What was that you said money couldn't buy?" he asked, in a voice that tried to feign indifference.

The parson paused before answering; looked at him, as it seemed, compassionately; and in a voice that was free from the hardness that had before characterized it, replied:

"The love of a true woman."

Paul stared at him in a startled fashion for a moment, as if the preacher had read his inmost thoughts. Then he passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Minister," he said, in a low voice, "I believe you're right—I know you're right!"

He looked out to where across the river he could catch a glimpse of that featureless, silent house, over which such an air of mystery and tragedy seemed to brood. As he gazed upon it his breath came quickly, and his whole body trembled with excitement.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "and to think it may be too late! I'd begin life again to-day without

a cent, if I only could have back the past twelve hours !”

“In the past your experience lies, in the present your opportunity, and in the future your hope,” was the sage-like comment.

“Then I’ll make use of the present,” and Paul made for the doorway.

“Are you mad?” cried the preacher, gripping him by the arm. “You’d be shot down before going ten yards. Stay where you are.”

Just at that moment O’Donohue shouted:

“Look out there, bhoys, they’re comin’ this time and no mistake! Let’s take tay wid them.”

And surely enough the rebels were coming, springing, as it were, from every bush and piece of cover along the river bank—half-breeds and Indians indiscriminately. They evidently thought from the silence in the township, and from the fact that not a soul could be seen anywhere, that the citizens had vacated Calumet in the darkness.

But they reckoned without their hosts. Hardly had they gained the open than to their surprise they were met by a steady fire. They paused to return it, and pushed on again. In two minutes more they would be in the town and a scene of

slaughter would begin, for the rebels outnumbered its defenders by five to one.

But ere they reached it, two things which seemed little less than providential, happened. A troop of fur-coated North-West Mounted Police, with jingling bits, smoking steeds, and carbines at the carry, swooped down into Calumet from the high ground to the south, and swept the invaders before them as hawks might scatter a flight of importunate small birds. And the sound as of a distant tropical thunderstorm was heard far up the river, proclaiming that the ice had begun to break up.

CHAPTER XIV.

“AND NOW, OLD CHAP——”

IF Steve Ironside, Ruth Macdonald, and the two other blood-stained and worn-out beings who were huddled together on the little wooded island, had not been so engrossed with the tragic nature of the situation, they might well have trembled with fear when they heard that startling sound. For it was more than the mere breaking up of the ice. It was the waters of the mighty river, which, having been dammed back some six miles farther up by huge masses of ice jammed between two great cliffs, had at last gained Titanic power, and forced out the barrier as powder carries the shell—dashing down at race-horse speed one vast, gleaming, grinding wall of blue waters and glistening bergs. And on that pulsating, pitiless crest were borne fantastically riven blocks of ice, which, catching the first pale

golden rays of the rising sun, reflected back its glories a thousand-fold; each transparent and prismatic mass shedding a rainbow of ever-changing hues, the whole blending in a weird and bewildering blaze of surpassing loveliness. It was as if an arc of violet, orange and pearly light were racing with that rebellious flood.

On it came at the speed of the wind, with the force of its invincible might, with the noise of heaven's artillery, and with its peerless beauty and majesty. Well might the hearts of those who saw and heard it sicken with fear.

Down it came, and before it the massive flooring of ice on the river split, shivered, was rent asunder, and flung aside as easily as the blue waves are parted by the share of some iron-clad leviathan. And, despite the terror they inspired, what a glimpse of fairyland were these chaotic and seething waters! For one could trace in the sea-blue and silvery bergs that rose and fell, forms of wondrous beauty—great temples, castles, cathedrals, all visions of the most exquisite design. There, for instance, was a forest of goodly-proportioned and delicate spires whose bases were of the purest and most heavenly blue, and whose crests were dreams

of silvered filigree work wed with the rarest tracery.

It was a city of marble palaces—a vision of arctic seas in miniature—a floating world of ice, with the crashing, grinding and thundering as of giant avalanches among Alpine heights, to herald its coming.

It was one of Nature's sublimest sights—one of her most potent and eloquent touches.

* * * * *

They instinctively drew closer together among the soddened grass and scanty undergrowth, that little, grimed and weary group of refugees. They had climbed to the highest point of the island, and with set and apathetic faces sat watching the all-engulfing flood as it came on, showing above the banks round the bend of the river. Was it coming to sweep them away just when they had deemed themselves safe? Were their poor wounded bodies to be still further mangled by these cruel, crushing, and cutting masses of ice? Steve groaned as he thought of it. But it was not for himself, but for those who were with him—she, in particular, who had never dreamt there was such tragedy in the

world as this. As for his own life, he had too often carried it in his hand to trouble much about it now.

More than likely, if he thought about it at all, it would have suggested itself to him in the light of a grim joke that a worthless, wasted existence such as his should be rated at any value whatever. The terrified maid-servant cowered, and put her hands to her face as if to shut out the night-marish spectacle. Poor wounded Sammy—so often denounced by the United Christian Brethren—prayed fervently and audibly, but without any signs whatever of moral or physical fear upon his face. Like Steve, Sammy hardly thought of himself at all.

As for Ruth Macdonald, she had torn up the long, coarse grass with her dainty white hands, and made a pillow with it for the head of the stricken man-servant. This done, she placed one hand on the ragged and blood-stained sleeve of Calumet's prodigal, and, looking into his eyes in a way that thrilled him strangely, said in a voice that was soft but unnaturally steady :

"I fear you've lost your life in trying to save ours. It seems, as you have said, that you are one of the unlucky ones." Then, as if struck by some

whimsical thought—"I wonder if the Fates are going to allow us to solve the great mystery together?"

It was an odd speech for a girl to make.

"That's a stiff one," he replied, with characteristic lightness of words; "but, if we've got to hand in our checks together, and are permitted to be partners in a fresh game, then I'll reckon that at last my luck has turned." And the Prodigal looked into her eyes with dignity and respect, but with a directness that made her heart beat strangely even then. Never by anyone in that gay world where they turned out pretty speeches after a set pattern, had she been paid such a compliment as this, and she knew that the man who gave utterance to it meant it.

Suddenly they saw a number of routed Indians and half-breeds, as if unconscious of the impending travelling maelstrom, make back from Calumet across the ice and towards the island. Now the hunted ones realized that if they escaped the floods they would be most assuredly murdered by these fugitives out of a spirit of revenge. There was only one thing to be done. Steve staggered to his feet, and with his sound arm waved a blood-stained

coat to his friends on the bank of the river. Then a few brief moments of soul-harrowing uncertainty until at last they were seen.

One man sprang from the bank in spite of those who strove to hold him back, and ran so as to intercept the Indians across the slippery, dangerous ice, along which now ran strange shivers and hollow booming sounds. It was surely a doubly mad thing to do — one man against a dozen! The Indians were quick, but this brave man, whoever he was, was quicker still, gaining the edge of the island while yet they were some hundred yards off.

And now the Indians realized the intention of this enemy; for some one "drew a bead" on him and fired. But the bullet whistled past him and embedded itself in the bank behind. The man returned the fire of the enemy. Steve also fired as best he could, and shouted to their would-be deliverer to ascend the slope and come under cover. The latter, however, without turning round, waved one hand as if signalling that not until the Indians had passed on would he come up.

He stood his ground right manfully. The Indians paused irresolute. One plucky heart with hope in

it is worth a dozen forlorn hopes any day. Another effectual shot amongst them sealed their fate—they wavered, some of them fired wildly, and then they turned and made for the far bank of the river.

But, before they could reach it, the wild waste of pitiless waters came sweeping round the bend with death in its gleaming, snowy-face—caught them up laughingly as they fled, filled with a mortal terror, and bore them away as the thistle-down is borne on the breath of the hurricane.

While this was happening, however, Steve had scrambled down the bank with a strangely eager desire to see who the hero was who had faced such odds to aid them. Could any such come out of Calumet?

Their rescuer had fallen on his face—that random volley had done its work—but by sheer force of heroic will he had kept on his feet until the Indians had turned their backs.

With almost reverential touch Steve raised the head of the wounded man. And then the eerie thought possessed him, that he had done this dread thing before in some other stage of existence.

“*Paul!*” he gasped.

And in the fulness of the revelation it was as if Time itself stood still.

The sorely-stricken Steve, weak though he was by this time, tried to lift him, but could not unaided. In another minute there was a woman by his side. With her help, Paul was carried and dragged up the bank to the highest point of the little island, and only just in time.

A great berg of ice had been driven right on to the spit on the up-side of the island, and it served to strand others, thus acting as a breakwater, and diverting the furious torrent of waters to either side, saving their little vantage ground from being altogether submerged. But the Angel of Death tarried with them for all that. The watery rays of the spring sun gleamed down with some promise of a fuller life upon a river of drifting ice, and a land of white and black that dripped and steamed. Already there was an earthy smell in the air, and far afield the faint breathings and echoings of unwonted sounds; already there were the tremors that move the bosom of Nature when a new spring is born.

There was the promise of a new life everywhere—even in the shadow of Azrael's wings. Is it not

strange to think that life should ever be nursed in the lap of death?

The thunderous roaring of the great flood had now somewhat subsided, and they could hear each other speak.

"Steve," suddenly said the dying man, "I feel as how it's a case with me—give us your hand, old chap. It's a queer thing, when one thinks of it, now, that it's the first time we've shaken hands for many a long year—and only the two of us left! Well, well!"

He paused, and looked strangely about him, as if indulging in mental speculation, but Steve could see it was also to draw a laboured breath. Then Paul, despite his brother's protestations, continued:

"Steve, there's been something wrong with our two lives—something that I reckon might have been put right if I'd only gone the right way about it. To begin with—and it's a queer thing to say—in thinking too much of the Church, I lost sight of the Christ and what He taught. I've been like that elder brother who was in the field, you know, when the younger one came home, and was angry when the fatted calf was killed. . . . I forgot to think that things might have been the other

way about, and that, instead of you, I might have gone just a little bit off the track. I thought too much of myself and my own position, instead of thinking—seeing the old man had gone—it was my bounden duty to take his place and lend a helping hand to you."

"Stop, Paul, stop!" cried the Prodigal; "how could I expect you to think of me when I would not think of myself? You never had a fair show, old boy. But don't talk any more just now; the ice is blocking the channel up between this and the shore, and they'll soon be able to get across for us."

"I'll be a dead man before then, Steve, so let me have my say right out now."

He turned those strangely wistful eyes of his upon Ruth Macdonald, who now was holding one of his hands in hers, as if to give him courage. "I had thought——" but he stopped abruptly, and looked from her to Steve. Then, with that mysterious perceptive sense which is often vouchsafed to the dying, he continued, with just a tinge of sadness in his voice, "But I should have been mistaken—I can see that plainly now. Yes, and it is better so. The preacher was right when he said there was

something that money could not buy. Steve, old boy, you'll have a goodish pile of dollars when I'm gone ; look upon it as that which you would have been welcome to if things had gone right and the old man had been alive. . . Just another word, Steve ; don't go thinking that because you've been a little bit wild in your time, and have kicked over the traces, you can't hold up your head again or ask any good woman to be your wife. That's all nonsense, boy ; the wildest colt often makes the best broncho."

Surely Nature was rejoicing over the birth of another spring, for there was a note of gladness in her thousand different voices. A soft, warm Chinook wind sprang up from the south-west ; one might have heard it sighing and whispering strangely among the reeds had it not been for the jarring of the drifting bergs. A little flock of reassured and rejoicing snow-birds hovered in mid-air above them, twittering an eloquent thanksgiving in their own sweet old-fashioned way. When one could not hear them, one might at least see the pulsating of their downy throats. And high in the heavens the gauzy cloud-racks were breaking up before the rays of the all-potent sun, that drew thin wreaths of

vaporous mist from the bare spots on the prairie, and from the swirling waters.

And beside Paul, in whose fast-dimming eyes the flame of life still flickered feebly, knelt two pathetic figures. One of them pillowed the head of the dying man upon her knees, trying to look down bravely upon him through her blinding tears; and the other held one of his hands, clasping it fondly, lingeringly, between his own soiled palms, as if he fain would have the departing one stay a little longer. In Steve's eyes were no tears: the agony that burned in his heart had dried them up. He had no words: the thought of that which might have been made speech seem all too weak.

Then, with the last hectic flicker that the flame of life gives out—just as the end of the wick flares up for a brief space in the oil of the lamp ere it goes out for ever, Paul rallied again, and said:

"And now, old chap, it's a long time since our dad had us two praying together at his knee—don't you think, Steve, we might just say that little prayer together once again—the one that begins 'Our Father,' you know—just in memory of old

times?—it's no Meeting-house touch: it's between ourselves and Him."

* * * * *

The cheerful, kindly sun smiled down as he had not smiled for many a weary day. He cleared the heavens of the drifting mists, and drew earth's sylph-like vapours to himself with one fond lingering kiss.

There was a lull now in the sounds upon the river, and one could hear the Chinook whisper strangely to itself as it strayed among the tall reeds by the banks. The little birds, that but a week before had found it hard to live among the snows, now darted to and fro, a noisy, merry throng. They quite forgot their hunger in the thought that spring had come again.

A great barrier of ice had been formed from the spit, where Paul had fallen, to the bank of the river, damming back the water from the shallow channel, sending it round by the other side of the island. And later on, when the little band of rescuers from Calumet picked their way across it, they found a wan-eyed, blood-stained man, and a tired but heroic girl, kneeling there hand in hand. Beside them

lay the dying, between them lay the dead, and over them brooded, spectre-like, fateful and dark-eyed Tragedy with her blood-smeared lips.

But in the hearts of that man and woman there was the birth of a new and a fuller life.

THE END.



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The *Daily Telegraph* says:—"Written in Mrs. Conney's happiest manner. 'Judy a Jilt' is a telling story, throughout which cloud and sunshine alternate in highly effective contrast."

The *Literary World* says:—"With all her faults, Judy has a guilelessness that attracts us, and she has to contend against odds that we feel are too heavy for her. It is a very racy story of military life."

The *Glasgow Record* says:—"We have given but a poor description of Mrs. Conney's striking novel. Of her fine character studies we have said little; they are many, and, in most instances, true to life—in some, unfortunately, too true. There is the major—gentleman, soldier, and blackleg; the colonel—brave, kind, and silly; Teddy—petted and selfish; Bailly—rich and unprincipled; and a host of minor characters, each drawn with considerable skill."

The *Life* says:—"A sad story, but relieved by some touches of kindness and sympathy. As a study of feminine character it is very good. The leading persons are well drawn. It is in fact a very readable book."

The *Saturday Review* says:—"Brightly written, and has a heroine who deserves better things than her very doleful end. Otherwise, the story is very good."

The *Athenæum* says:—"By the title alone we should range it with the fiction of the sixties. It was a decade rich in unconsidered trifles in the literary line. Judy created havoc in the hearts of all the men about her, and scorn and suspicion in the breasts of mothers with plain daughters. Of course, as the story is by Mrs. Conney, there are horses; but it is by the agency of the sea that the little heroine meets her death."

The *Bradford Observer* says:—"Judy is certainly a jilt, and that unfortunately is the chief impression her short stormy life leaves behind on even these who knew her best. But her biographer shews us much more—the innate nobility and generosity of a nature spoilt largely by untoward circumstances and bad training, but displaying, nevertheless, at some critical turns of her fate, a greater power of self-control and self-sacrifice than many a so-called better woman would command. We share the fate of her other victims, and love poor Judy in spite of her contempt for Mrs. Grundy."

The *New Age* says:—"The story is well put together and eminently readable."

The *East Anglian Daily Times* says:—"Mrs. Conney handles her materials well, and writes with much ability and vivacity; in point of technique the story is thoroughly readable."

The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* says:—"The characters are all sketched with a free hand. The book is altogether well-written, and of a pleasantly readable and interesting nature."

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New Gz. Nobel.

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Lady Jean's Son. By SARAH TYTLER, Author of
"Lady Jean's Vagaries," "Citoyenne Jacqueline,"
"St. Mungo's City," etc. Second Edition.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* says:—"The glimpses of Edinburgh society, while the northern Athens was still the seat of fashion, of wild Kitty Queensberry, of Mrs. Cockburn, the Madame de Sevigne of Canongate, and of Mrs. Jacky Murray, sister of the great Lord Mansfield, who ruled the routs at the old Assembly Rooms with a despotic sway, are life-like and clever. 'Lady Jean's Son' is, from first to last, a delightful story."

The *Times* says:—"A Scottish novel, in which the Scots is not provincial, not that of Ayrshire ploughmen, or Forfarshire weavers, or wild Picts of Galloway, but good Scots of Lothian and the Forest, is not a common book. Since Mr. Stevenson died only Mrs. Oliphant and Miss Sarah Tytler can write the tongue. Miss Tytler's 'Lady Jean's Son' is a pleasure to the amateur of the well of Scots undefiled. The 'local colour' is excellent, the characters are those of the proud, homely gentlefolk of a Scotland not yet wholly reduced from her old rank as a kingdom. In fact, Miss Tytler enables our fancies to live in the old Edinburgh Society. It is a pleasant, quiet, self-contained little romance, to which the reader may fearlessly commit himself."

The *Daily Mail* says:—"It is a delightful romance."

The *Daily News* says:—"The story evolves through picturesque and romantic scenes. It affords pleasant reading, and we gratefully acknowledge the author's not too unsparing use of dialect."

The *Morning Leader* says:—"A wonderfully readable and stirring romance of the last century in the Scottish capital. Few writers have presented such graphic pictures of the ancient city as will be found in the pages of 'Lady Jean's Son.'"

The *Aberdeen Daily Free Press* says:—"Amid the host of novel writers, the name of Sarah Tytler has an assured place. The veteran authoress writes with undiminished skill and vigour, and in the book before us she founds a pleasant and absorbing story upon an old Scottish '*cause célèbre*.'"

The *Glasgow Herald* says:—"The story is charmingly told, and the pictures of life in Old Edinburgh are delightful."

The *Scotsman* says:—"It is a pleasant narrative of a place, time, and circumstances of which Scottish people are well inclined to cherish the reminiscences."

The *Glasgow Daily Mail* says:—"In her description of these typical public and private gatherings of Old Edinburgh, the authoress is at her best."

The *Star* says:—"Full of tender sympathy, and is never dull."

The *Daily Telegraph* says:—"The interest of this clever tale is centred upon the famous Douglas succession case."

The *Literary World* says:—"The story is a vigorous, wholesome, and pleasing piece of work that is well worth reading."

The *Leeds Mercury* says:—"Attractive and enjoyable."

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New 6s. Nobel.

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Colour Sergeant No. 1 Company. By MRS.

LEITH ADAMS, Author of "Bonnie Kate," "Louis Draycott," "The Peyton Romance," "Geoffrey Stirling," "Madelon Lemoine," "A Garrison Romance," etc.

Second Edition.

The *World* says:—"Unaffectedly humorous, in a simple, genuine fashion. The story contains a number of well-drawn characters. Various regimental types are paraded with the greatest success. Then there are two most captivating children. Little Missie, daintiest, quaintest of delightful dolls, likely to eclipse the fame of that other child of the regiment, 'Bootle's Baby' and the wizened little atomy, Patsey, an Irish tiny Tim—with a difference. Most certainly a book to be recommended."

The *Saturday Review* says:—"In this story Mrs. Leith Adams deals with materials which she has treated with distinguished success. The scenes of barrack life in Ireland during the Fenian scare are good, and it would be difficult to conceive anything of the kind that is better."

The *New Age* says:—"Mrs. Adams has given us in this book a thoroughly healthy, and at the same time, a thoroughly interesting story. It is admirably told and of distinct literary merit."

The *Aberdeen Daily Free Press* says:—"The reading of Mrs. Adams' newest novel has been an unalloyed pleasure from beginning to end, and has greatly strengthened our opinion that the gifted authoress stands in the very front rank of British novelists. An excellently worked-out plot, a judicious mixture of pathos and humour, a polished style, and a well-chosen *locale* combine to make the 'Colour Sergeant' a most readable book. The Sergeant's lady-love is one of the most womanly portraits to be found in a novel, and all the other personages are one and all masterly described. Mrs. Adams' word-pictures of Irish scenery are among the choicest bits of the book. There is not a dull page—nay, not a line—in the story that even the most callous reader will find it in his heart to skip."

The *Morning Post* says:—"Mrs. Leith Adams' interesting novel, 'Colour Sergeant No. 1 Company' should long remain popular on account of its graphic and moving pictures of the Irish peasantry, and also of the Fenian movement, which furnishes many incidents of the plot."

The *Court Journal* says:—"Mrs. Leith Adams invariably writes with so womanly and sympathetic a pen that it is always a pleasure to read her stories, and her admirers will find one more work to their taste in her latest novel—'Colour Sergeant No. 1 Company.'"

The *Manchester Guardian* says:—"Eminently readable, and shows considerable power of telling a story, simply and well."

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NEW GZ. NOBEL.

Crown 8vo, Art Linen, Gilt Top.

The Inn by the Shore. By FLORENCE WARDEN,
Author of "Pretty Miss Smith," "A Prince of
Darkness," "A House on the Marsh," "A Perfect
Fool," etc. 4th Edition.

The *Academy* says:—"Miss Florence Warden is unrivalled in a certain department of fiction. 'The Inn by the Shore' exhibits her at her best. It is full of marvellous mystery; and to the credit of the author, it must be confessed that the clue to the mystery is exceedingly difficult to find in advance."

The *Daily News* says:—"A story of mystery and crime, from the pen of Miss Florence Warden. Who perpetrates the robberies in the solitary inn by the shore? Whose is the soft little hand that in the dead of night skilfully extracts from under the visitor's pillow the watch and purse he has hidden there? On a wintry evening, at the fireside, one might do worse than spend an hour in seeking to puzzle it out. The story provides sensations that will satisfy those who care for an uncritical shudder."

The *New Age* says:—"We can heartily recommend as a certain remedy for ennui, and as a companion in moments when you may have a vacant or a pensive mood, without anything to rejoice either the outward or inward eye, Miss Florence Warden's new and interesting story. It is a capital tale in every respect. From the first page to the last, the story is brightly and crisply written."

Punch says:—"A clearly-told and alluringly-exciting story."

The *Literary World* says:—"The Inn by the Shore' is full of sensational reading, and, can expect to find a large measure of favour with those who favour stories of crime and its unfolding."

The *Dundee Advertiser* says:—"Readers acquainted with Florence Warden's 'House on the Marsh' will not require to be pressed to take up her new novel. It is fully as romantic and entertaining as its famous predecessor. The broad effect of the tale is extremely successful."

The *Belfast Evening Telegraph* says:—"The title of this work at once induces the reader to jump at conclusions, and those who take it up in the hope of tragedy and mysteries unravelled will not be disappointed. The unveiling of the mysteries is skilful; the whole story is well-conceived and successfully executed."

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* says:—"How Miss Warden skilfully weaves her plot, and as skilfully unweaves it, until we know the truth makes up a tale with delightful and sustained interest, which the reader will enjoy."

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New 6s. Nobel.

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The Green Book. By MAURUS JÓKAI, Author of "Black Diamonds," "Midst the Wild Carpathians," "Pretty Michal," etc. Translated into English by Mrs. Waugh (Ellis Wright), with portrait of Dr. JÓKAI. (Authorised Edition.) Fifth Edition.

Mr. W. L. Courtney, in the *Daily Telegraph* says:—"No preface or apology is needed for the new novel of Maurus Jókai, 'The Green Book.' It is a truly astonishing book, the latest novel, dealing with the early years of the present century, and with that world of inarticulate romance, the Empire of all the Russias.

"All the superficial culture and essential barbarism of the country are depicted in these pages. We see how the Moujik alternately plots and trembles, how the Tsar himself is checked in all his noblest aspirations by the iron framework of a society to which he is really slave, and Imperial conventions which he is powerless to break through. Jókai, in force and fire and prodigal variety, reminds one of the elder Dumas."

The *Daily Chronicle* says:—"The Author has given us a group of striking personalities, every one of whom is brilliantly drawn and vividly presented. All Jókai's very remarkable powers of characterisation, of individualising, are displayed here as strongly as in anything he has ever written. The historic moment chosen is an extremely dramatic one. The scenes are laid in Russia, at the end of the first quarter of the present century, when Russian society and the Imperial army were seething with revolutionary emotion, and St. Petersburg was a nest of intrigues. Jókai has a rare faculty of seeing all round his characters, of penetrating rough exteriors, and of probing to whatever of genuine human fibres they may have. From every point of view, 'The Green Book' is a book to be read. It is an interesting and knowledgeable narrative of a puzzling, political period; and it is a work of fine art."

The *Bookseller* says:—"In no other novel has the author attained the vivacity, the wit, the dramatic contrivance exemplified in this romance. The scene between the Imperial Censor (of morals) and the artist employed upon Arakhsieff's palace might have come straight out of Molière. The conjecture of Sophie's funeral and Bethsaba's wedding are worthy of the elder Dumas. Then, what a touch of nature is that where Sophie discovers that her own pretended is her mother's lover."

The *Aberdeen Free Press* says:—"Another work by Jókai, made accessible to English readers, is a literary event of more than common note. 'The Green Book' will be found an excellent specimen of the novelist's work, marked as it is by the best characteristics of Jókai's soaring genius. It is a series of brilliant, dramatic episodes, strung together by slender threads of love and political intrigue. Nowhere will one find better examples than in 'The Green Book' of Jókai's deep and expansive imaginative power."

The *Eastern Daily Press* says:—"A Russian historical romance, cast in vigorous and original mould, and full of that realistic power and picturesque description, which give Dr. Jókai a place in the front rank of popular writers."

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